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## Getting Vaccinated with Abdala Vaccine

By: Giusette León García / CubaSi

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I went to bed late. I should not have to if I wanted to stay true to my promise to be there before 8 AM. *“No later than 8:30 AM,”* I said to myself when I turned off the alarm to *“catch another 5-minutes break”* ..., which became 10 minutes, and when I got to the doctor’s office my hopes of being one of the first patients had vanished (it was earlier than 8:30 AM): several neighbors, with the same faith and more punctual than me, were already waiting for their first dose of the **Abdala** vaccine.

*“She is a new doctor, a young woman with strong personality,”* I was warned by Ana María, the woman living at the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. She could not get vaccinated as she is allergic to Thimerosal, but Thimerosal-free vials are already on their way. That is what they said to her, so she kept me updated.

### **The doctor...**

Her name is Magela Fernández Pérez and she is replacing our family doctor who has been working for months in the red zone (she herself told me that, not Ana María, while she waited for the vials in order to resume the last day of the first-dose vaccination process).

*“It has been a very exhausting experience. Since day one, we —along with the citizens— have had the responsibility to repair the doctor’s office, install water tanks, and be better organized so everything flows correctly. We had to gather information on the population, and hence take note of that population age groups...”*

*“We are going to vaccinate a total of 653 individuals,”* she said. But she is not thinking over her exhaustion, but in the light at the end of that long tunnel, which has been hovering around for 14+ months resulting in more than one thousand casualties:

*“It has been a weird month, but worthy nonetheless. Perhaps I will not be working here in three months from now, but I will be certain that this population, which is already ageing, will be less vulnerable and I am happy to know I had my share of contribution to get out of this situation as soon as possible.”*

She has done a lot more...I told myself, but I did not voice out my thoughts as I did not want to interrupt her:

*"We have ruled out some individuals who are allergic to Thimerosal and others who got vaccinated in their work places. But then, we included individuals whose home address is not here, but they live with their couples or they just came from other provinces and could not make it to get back. Well, they all get vaccinated here.*

*"People's behavior has been amazing. Luckily, we have not experienced any negative reaction. They have been so grateful. People get in here and start to take pictures so everyone knows they are getting vaccinated with the **Abdala** vaccine. Some, in the initial interview, have their high blood pressure. But it has not been necessary to medicate them. They sit, chat for a few minutes, and they are ready. It is the excitement!"*

Luckily, the small place where we have talked has not played its role as it was designed to provide first aid to those suffering any adverse event.

### **The stomatologist...**

*"You are going to get vaccinated, right? Wait and see my point..."* And she is not bluffing. The fact is that in order to be someone who manages very well that big syringe with which stomatologist work, she perfectly handles that small syringe everyone wants to be immunized with worldwide:

*"It has been a wonderful experience to me. There is a difference between working with mouth cavities and vaccinating patients who tell me it does not hurt them. They did not even feel it. It makes me happy. I love what I do. I have a sense of professional belonging. That is why I studied for and I have engaged in this mission with joy no matter it is not my usual work."*

And you will notice at a glance the joy of Zunamy Álvarez Hevia. And I tested first hand her grace with syringe when it was my time to get vaccinated with **Abdala**.

### **The nurse...**

Her main role is played at the recovery room. There, nurses take vitals along with two medicine students. They also fill the vaccination cards...But similar to doctors, they focus on every single detail and when exhaustion comes, they hold to a conviction:

*"Although we are still talking about vaccine candidates, results have been very positive and I see this whole process as healing stage for all of us, a huge relief."*

Yusnelis Llerena Tombo is not new in the neighborhood. She works as a nurse at the doctor's office and she also lives in the same building. And she confesses: *"My patients are my neighbors. They are family." But I did not know she has been working in the primary health care for only five years. She worked as an intensive care nurse, which is her majoring. However, primary health care is something magical for her: "We are here every day. We advise people. We do preventive work. We accompany patients and become friends. We heal with our words."*

### **The female students...**

It is my turn. My blood pressure is normal (110-80), my body temperature 36,5...I am ok. Any allergies? None. My vitals are correct. My recorder is on. I have to take advantage on the fact that girl students are responsible of welcoming, surveying, and doing the initial examination to patients about to get vaccinated with **Abdala**. What is your opinion on this experience?

*"I am in my fourth school year and I have been always linked to this doctor's office. Then, when I was told about this vaccination process, I wanted to come here together with María Alejandra, who has spent her time in the active population inquiry. We already knew the population here and got real close to them. My experience has been great. All patients have helped us and they understood the work we were doing. They have cared for us. They have babied us. Some offer us a fruit juice, a snack, encouraging words when we are tired..."* Lianne López Guerra said.

Her schoolmate, in her third school year at the university, cannot deny that *"we do miss the academic side of the school. But we understand it was necessary to pause to carry out the population inquiry, which helps the find the*

*positive cases on time. We guide people, but this vaccination time has provided us a contact with patients that we had not had for a while.”*

### **The male students...**

After I got vaccinated by Zunamy, I could interview the boys. After all, they were monitoring my health for an hour, right? I remained silent the necessary time for them to check my vitals. I was still ok. Minutes later, Gianluca Ruiz told me about his everyday routine as a volunteer...

*“I might have said no. But my will to do something for my nation was huge. It was my time to contribute to get out of this pandemic as soon as possible. I am very pleased with what we are doing here. Patients show gratitude when they get vaccinated and have faith in our success...”*

Gianluca is already in the final school year of his major. While Javier, the young man next to him in the post-vaccination observation room, feels he has learned a lot:

*“The experience has been great. This is not a common situation, even though vaccination campaigns in our country are common. This is different and we are not experts on the issue, perhaps. But it does show our commitment as doctors, that we are ready to take up on any challenge for the wellbeing of our people...”*

That is precisely the reason why Javier Perdomo felt in love with medicine. His mom is a doctor and he learned since he was a kid that medicine was about doctor's will to help people...

### **The President of CDR (Committee for the Defense of the Revolution)**

When my recorder paused, I felt the smell of a recently-made coffee. Miss Yusnelis warned me: *“Look, journalist, she is the President of our CDR. She has been with us since day one.”*

When she gave a cup of coffee to each of us, and soon before it got cold, she confessed me why there was so much commitment and will: *“We need to do our best, each of us, to succeed and overcome this pandemic, so we can move on with our lives. I trust our health personnel, our Revolution, all the sacrifice we have made so far.”*

### **More than just a vaccine...**

At Doctor's Office # 4 belonging to the Julián Grimau Polyclinic, in Arroyo Naranjo, the delegate of the district helped with the painting, the local PCC and FMC affiliates were responsible for making appointments and guarantee that people did not crowd too much the immunization clinics. Neighbors carried out the plumbing work to install the water tanks, others went every afternoon to do the cleaning. The President of the CDR was another member of that team and she was ready to take up on any mission.

And that was not an isolated event. Someone did it in the province of Matanzas at the immunization clinic where, simultaneously, my brother got vaccinated. And it is happening nationwide, as I see the posts of my friends in social networks. All of us have the same faith...

The title of this chronic may be understood as irreverent. But we speak like that, it is not a secret. That is the way Cubans talk about their stuff, genuine and beloved. That is the way we translate this inclusive joy (I am referring to humanism), this faith spreading across our nation and can be named **Abdala**, or **Soberana**, and sooner than later, **Mambisa** will be added to that list, too. And sooner than later, they will not be vaccine candidates anymore, but vaccines. Those who want to tag me as an optimist, I will accept it. I have my reasons as Cuba has proven me right again and again: hope, resilience, that faith moving mountains, saving. It always saves.

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