

# The Religious Exemption Trap

Beginning in September, hospital administrators across the country began threatening to fire health care workers who had not received the so-called COVID vaccine. They claimed to be complying with the Biden administration's fake mandate, which is actually a [press release](#) without the force of law. A large majority of those workers have already received the shots (in New York state, for example, [about 84](#) percent are vaccinated).

It's not easy to resist unrelenting psychological pressure from the government, media, and administrators, so those who have resisted so far must have good reasons to refuse. The refusers gained a temporary respite on Oct. 12, when a U.S. district judge [issued](#) a ruling preventing the state from mandating shots for workers who claim a religious exemption.

Unfortunately, their relief is likely to be short-lived. I've seen this play out before.

About 10 years ago, hospitals in Baltimore changed their policy on influenza vaccines from voluntary to mandatory. The only exceptions were medical contraindication (previous life-threatening reaction to a flu shot) or religious objection. Anyone wishing to be exempted for religious reasons had to furnish a letter from a minister supporting the claim.

Now, I had never had the flu; and in 30 years of medical practice, I had never taken a flu shot. Nor did I have any desire to do so. Fortunately, I had no difficulty in obtaining a letter from a like-minded minister.

A year or two later the religious exemption went away. There was no explanation as to what medical or metaphysical revelation had caused this exception to vanish, but by the time it happened, a compliant herd of doctors, nurses, and aides had grown accustomed to getting a jab every year. It was

no big deal to them. Nobody was dropping dead from the vaccine; nobody wanted to think about less immediate adverse effects; and even if the manufacturers were not very good at guessing the right strain of flu, it seemed like free insurance. Oddballs like me, who saw no point in monkeying with our immune systems to prevent a trivial and unlikely infection, were in a tiny minority.

When the exemption went away, there was no one to stand in solidarity with the few who wanted to say no to the shot. If you didn't comply, you wouldn't be allowed into the hospital without a mask, and you would be treated like an untouchable. I am ashamed to say that in 2013, I let them inject me. At the end of the next year, I retired without taking another dose and watched the rest of the herd line up for its [illusion](#) of immunity.

The main reason for the appalling lack of skepticism about vaccine mandates is that a legal concern over "standard of care" is burned into the brains of doctors. Standard of care is a legal term used in malpractice lawsuits, and departure from the defined standard may be grounds for a malpractice suit if anything goes wrong in diagnosis or treatment. One of the supposed arbiters of the standard of care, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), [says](#), "Everyone **6 months of age and older** should get an influenza (flu) vaccine every season with rare exception." [Emphasis mine.] If it's safe and necessary for babies—like say, Johnson's Baby Powder—how can any rational person object? If you want to see how snide and condescending a doctor can be, just try questioning the CDC's recommendations.

In a medical culture of extreme compliance spurred by fear of being sued, the transition from optional to recommended to mandatory happens very rapidly. The opportunity to plead religious objections is only a transition—a ploy to suppress resistance—until it's too late.

It's also a clever deflection from the real issue, which is informed consent. A basic principle of medical ethics is that consent to a medical intervention must be voluntary. Every patient has the nearly absolute [right](#) to refuse whatever the medical system is pushing (a rare exception being active infection with a dangerous communicable disease such as tuberculosis). That refusal is valid whether it derives from reasoned evaluation of the medical literature or from belief in a divine revelation. But don't count on the [Supreme Court](#) to recognize it.

I suspect that the authoritarians who impose medical mandates enjoy the irony of compelling their subjects to confess an irrational objection as the *only* escape from subjugation. "Jump, little doggie; jump through the hoop!" Then how they must smile as they snatch the hoop away. "Ha! Another victory for reason over superstition! Got you, you selfish, loony, superstitious freak!"

The religious exemption trap implicitly denies the possibility of alternative reasoning or differing interpretation of the scientific evidence. In so doing, it reinforces the smug intolerance of the ruling class.

For those who have only a few months before retirement, claiming a religious exemption may be a prudent move, if not a brave one. But for everyone else, there is only one option—and it's not showing some administrator the data and the peer-reviewed papers. If those people cared about anything but their own job security, they wouldn't be violating the basic rights of their employees.

The only option is the [one demonstrated](#) by the pilots of Southwest Airlines. Organize, stand up, and say no. The tyrants will continue to threaten, [lie](#), and manipulate; but they cannot win against a people determined to be free.

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