

Unprotected People #95

Pneumococcal

Pneumococcal Pneumonia: How I let down my friend

Linda K. Ohri, PharmD, associate professor of Pharmacy Practice at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, writes about her elderly friend's illness with pneumococcal pneumonia, which served as a powerful reminder to Dr. Ohri that talking about the importance of immunization is both a professional and personal responsibility.

I have a close friend who is 86 years young, and a dynamic testament on how to grow older gracefully. She has been a foster grandparent to my children since they were infants and feels like a second mother to me.

I am very active as an educator and advocate for optimal immunization across the lifespan. I believe that immunization represents one of the most beneficial and cost-effective strategies we have to prevent disease and promote health in people of all ages.

Unfortunately, a few years ago, I discovered that I wasn't practicing what I preached in my personal relationships. It wasn't until my friend developed pneumococcal pneumonia in about November that

I realized I had never asked her if she had been immunized or talked to her about the benefits and safety of the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV23). She's tough and didn't require hospitalization for her illness. However, she essentially lost 3 months where she was pretty much confined to home, and struggled to recover her previously robust health. She and I were lucky — she did recover and was ready to play golf when spring weather arrived. As for me, I learned a lesson that immunization advocacy should begin at home.

She has received her pneumococcal vaccination, and I've gotten better at bringing up issues of optimal immunization with all of my family and friends. I would rather be kidded as a "vaccine nag" than again suffer the guilt of not having recommended a vaccine that could have been life saving for someone I care about.

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