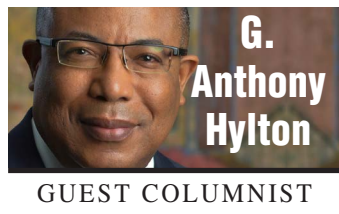


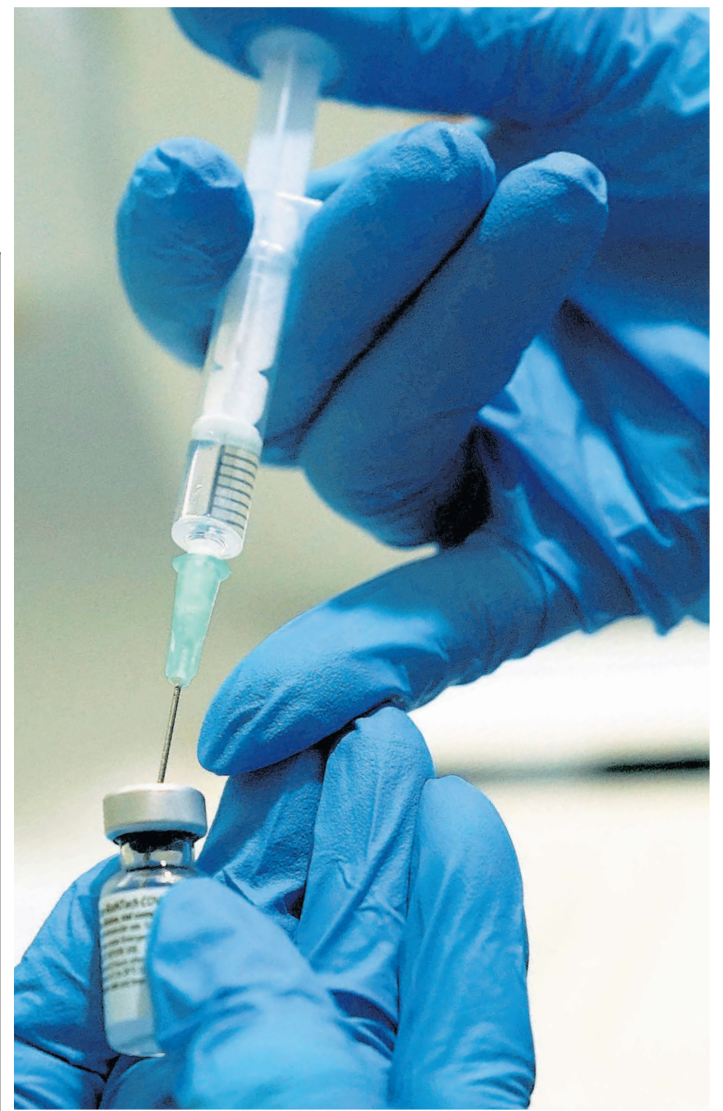
# Needed Urgently: A plan to distribute COVID-19 vaccines



**T**HE LATEST development concerning the coronavirus pandemic is the pending approval in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, China, and elsewhere, of several vaccines with the potency to immunise

individuals against the infection and spread of the coronavirus. This development has been widely anticipated for several weeks or months now as we followed the human trials of the vaccines and news of their exceptional performance in those

trials. So the decision by the UK Ministry of Health to issue emergency-use authorisation for the Pfizer-manufactured drug and the anticipated authorisation for emergency use of the Moderna-manufactured drug, along with news of the



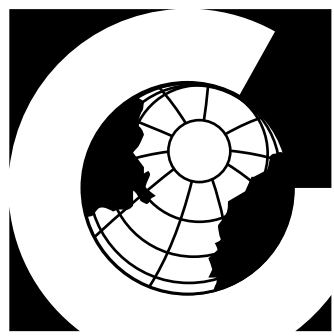
A Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is prepared at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle, England, Tuesday, December 8, 2020. AP

five vaccines being manufactured in China, should come as no surprise to anyone, much less the minister and officials of the Ministry of Health and Wellness here in Jamaica who are charged with monitoring developments concerning the prevention and spread of the pandemic.

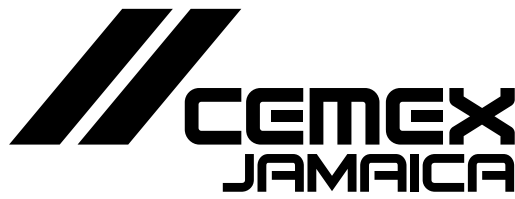
The question must be asked: Why then is the minister and his health team appearing to be scrambling to put a plan in place for the supply, distribution, and administration of the vaccine? This sense of urgency

was created recently when the minister in answer to a question posed to him in the House of Parliament a few weeks ago, responded by indicating that a committee was only then being put together to develop such a plan. Last Tuesday past the minister returned to the House to announce the establishment of the National COVID-19 Vaccine Commission (NCVC), comprising a multidisciplinary and multistakeholder group of persons. The terms of reference of the NCVC is, *inter alia*, to "provide

PLEASE SEE **URGENT**, J6



**CARIB CEMENT COMPANY LIMITED**



## REQUEST FOR INTEREST (RFI)



Caribbean Cement Company/Cemex Jamaica Limited is seeking to engage the services of companies who can provide forklift, excavator and heavy-duty equipment rental. Interested contractors, please send company profile and other key information to [CCCLPurchasingGroup@tclgroup.com](mailto:CCCLPurchasingGroup@tclgroup.com)

# PICJ

## Aims to Eliminate Need for Open Heart Surgery in Treating 'Holes in The Heart'

- Kian McKoy

"Have you ever had your chest cracked open?" Dr. Shaun Smithson, interventional cardiologist, asked matter-of-factly. For many Jamaicans, this procedure known as a thoracotomy would be a risky but necessary step in the assessment and treatment of Patent Foramen Ovale (PFO) or Atrial Septal Defect (ASD).

These conditions are both forms of what is commonly referred to as "hole in the heart," and would involve open heart surgery to correct. However, the medical staff at Partners Interventional Centre of Jamaica (PICJ), along with Dr. Smithson and medical supplier Venbiz Medical, are working to make a far less invasive therapy the norm for Jamaican patients.

"PFO closures can now be done percutaneously which is via the blood vessels," Dr. Victor Elliott, interventional cardiologist and managing director at PICJ, explained. This procedure will be added to the list of catheter-based treatments offered at the facility, in the hopes of showing Jamaicans that these life-saving cardiovascular conditions can be remedied locally, by non-invasive means.

November 28, 2020 marks the first time Adults with these conditions were treated with Amplatzer closure devices in Jamaica. During this procedure, the device is introduced into the heart through the blood vessels eliminating the need to open the chest and heart. The device is positioned across the hole in the heart and adjusted to close the defect, under X-ray guidance. Dr. Elliott and overseas-based cardiologist, Dr. Smithson, in his capacity as a visiting doctor, performed two PFO closures and completed the assessment for the more complex ASD.

In addition to being a major breakthrough for advancing healthcare in Jamaica, the benefits to patients are remarkable. The PFO in particular is more of a flap, and it forms while we are in the womb, to direct the flow of blood between the right and left side of the heart. The flap usually closes by the time of birth but could take one to two years. In cases where it is detected in adolescents, doctors move to close. Otherwise, these openings go undetected in approximately 20% of all persons. They are sometimes the causes of stroke in young people, particularly if they have comorbidities that put them at risk of blood clots.

"Most of us think of stroke as something for older persons," Dr. Elliott said, "so if you start having these

strokes when you are young, you can see it will eventually cause significant problems as you get older." Other consequences of these defects can be tiring easily during regular exercise or even breathlessness with daily activities, particularly for persons with an ASD -- which is a permanent hole requiring closure and not just a flap.

More invasive surgeries typically have longer recovery times. Using this closure method and device allows patients to leave the hospital usually on the next day which means going back to normal life sooner. "Closing them means you are going to keep these people productive...and [allow them to] have a fulfilled life as a young person," Dr. Elliott said.

As the science of cardiology advances, it is moving towards less invasive surgery for all categories of cardiovascular disease therapies, which lowers overall risks to patients. Dr. Smithson is particularly excited by this development which he noticed picked up towards the latter end of his medical training. "[And now] it accelerated to where we're doing structural heart intervention without open heart surgery."

Expenses are also lessened now that this procedure is offered locally, by eliminating the need for overseas travel and accommodations. Consider the additional health risks of travelling during the era of COVID-19. There is also the added benefit of being in your home country and close to family. All in all, the percutaneous closure method saves time, resources, money, and offers patients a bit more peace of mind.

Open heart surgery also leaves a significant scar down the middle of the chest which can be an unwanted souvenir. As William Martin, manager at Venbiz Medical, points out this procedure leaves no scars. "[We're] moving from opening the chest, to a small puncture on the thigh to access the femoral artery and from there they access the heart." Both measurement of the opening to get the right size device, and deployment of the closure are done this way.



Partners for Life! An elite team of Doctors collaborated with PICJ to improve the lives of 3 patients with "holes in the heart"

Experiencing firsthand the growth of their profession and forging new partnerships is only part of the perks, Dr. Smithson said. "Everybody had the same mandate -- we want to do good. There's no ego involved, it's all about the patients"



"This is my opportunity to give back to Jamaica" Dr. Shaun Smithson visiting Interventional Cardiologist with Dr. Victor Elliott in the Catheterization Lab at PICJ.



Anesthesiologist Dr. Cleopatra Patterson working with the technicians to maintain adequate sedation of the patient.

