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Transcript: *AMA Vice President, Dr Chris Moy, ABC Breakfast with Thomas Oriti, Friday, 4 December 2020*

Subject: UK COVID-19 vaccine news

THOMAS ORITI: I'm joined now by Dr Chris Moy, the vice president of the Australian Medical Association. Dr Moy, good morning, thank you for your time.

CHRIS MOY: G'day.

THOMAS ORITI: What was your reaction when you first heard that the UK was moving forward with the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine?

CHRIS MOY: Look, surprised because essentially - I mean, they're in disaster mode over there in terms of the way they've managed COVID. And we are of the understanding that they'd really been doing a lot of the assessments in rapid stage in parallel as the vaccine was in the final stages of development. And really, it's not surprising to come to this because the decision is partly based on their more intensive nature of their assessment, but also because of the fact that on balance of risks, they've actually made this decision that they need to go now. So, I think that it's not totally surprising, but really, that shouldn't affect the way the assessments occur anywhere else, in particular Australia.

THOMAS ORITI: Yeah, I mean, Australia's taking a more cautious approach, isn't it? We've heard from the Government. It says it'll still be several months until the vaccine is available here. Is there an upside to waiting?

CHRIS MOY: Oh, certainly. The thing about Australia's vaccination system and, you know, people always talk about the wonderful technology and the wonderful efforts of the scientists here. Look, we've got to hand it to them. Amazing new technology, particularly with the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccine. But I think the strength of the vaccination system in Australia and immunisation system in Australia is partly the innovation. It's also the regulatory system and the Therapeutic Goods Administration and the system that goes through because, you know, what they do is that they basically read all the fine detail, ask all the hard questions about safety and whether, you know, the studies were done correctly before approving it.

So, it's that combination on the one hand, you know, yin, which is really the development, but yang which is the regulation, which is really critical. And so, for Australia, we firstly get to go through and do this absolutely as rigorously as possible. But also, we get to watch the UK take it for a spin.

THOMAS ORITI: [Interrupts] Yeah, I mean - sorry go.

CHRIS MOY: Essentially what they do... what vaccines have gone through up to now is the phase one, two and three trials; the phase three trials where they've taken about 50,000 people to test it. And that's what's happened so far. But there is a thing called a phase four assessment, which is really when it's taken out into the community. And in essence, the UK will be doing that for Australia.

THOMAS ORITI: It's sort of like a phase four trial, yeah. I mean, Dr Anthony Fauci in the US, he's raised some concerns about the UK moving so quickly. I mean, do people need to be concerned here about the potential side effects or other health issues when it comes to a coronavirus vaccine?

CHRIS MOY: Well, there's actually several types of vaccines so I can't go into each one. But the Pfizer vaccine-

THOMAS ORITI: [Interrupts] Different technologies involved, yeah.

CHRIS MOY: Yeah, incredible. And the Pfizer one is created from this incredible new technology which was initially developed for cancer treatment, interestingly. The technology on the face of it – and I've read a fair bit about it – appears to have very few holes and it appears firstly, incredibly safe, but also an incredibly – incredible way of developing vaccines quickly in the future. Having said that, it is new and I think for anything new and for anybody in the community, what they need is when their GP comes up to them and gives them that vaccine, they need the assurance that, you know, the people that actually know how to check it have checked it. And I think the thing is for Australia, we need to understand that. And I think for us this year, we've got the time. The best bit about Australia is the management of the pandemic has been fantastic and we've got the time to do this properly.

THOMAS ORITI: On that note, though, can I point you to a situation in New South Wales at the moment? And health authorities are dealing with an infected hotel quarantine worker. We know the person had been taking the train for several days to work. I mean, do you expect to hear about more new cases in Sydney?

CHRIS MOY: I haven't got any news about that at the moment. But I suppose what the information about that is, you know, reinforcing yet again how great a danger is hotel quarantine. Although we've done an incredible job so far bringing so many people back into Australia, and we need to keep bringing Australians, we need to continue to improve the standards, which was actually what came out of the recent review. And we need to implement things like recommendations that have come out in South Australia about taking anybody positive into maybe another hotel. Or considerations for just staff to be working in hotel quarantining as in Victoria. But I think that's one thing.

The other thing is, is that really for Australia, although we've done really well and we're coming to summer and Christmas, we need to be still on the alert and we cannot fully relax. We need to be essentially in a braced position because every time- you know, we've lived it in South Australia the last few weeks, so we weren't ready and we need to be ready if it breaks out like this.

THOMAS ORITI: Because we're now coming into - well, we're now in summer. Warm weather is coming. It's certainly coming to parts of the country this weekend. Some thinking about trips to the beach, holiday gatherings. I mean, are you concerned about COVID complacency given, as you pointed out, the numbers in Australia are comparatively very, very low.

CHRIS MOY: Very. And the AMA is extremely concerned about this. And we're actually quite concerned about the overall national framework for reopening drafts, which really said that we want to get Australia to just basically no restrictions by Christmas. And I think the situation in South Australia and New South Wales tells you that it's very hard to do that and it puts us at risk when that happens. Because you're not ready and what happens is it does breed the complacency that it's all fine, but also that once it gets going, it could get into the community and end up in a Victorian situation very quickly.

Having said that, so, the thing I'd say is that all Australians, please do your bit. We do need to continue to use masks in enclosed areas and maintain physical distance. Do your physical distancing, maintaining hygiene, because we've done such a great job. We've got this holy grail which is the vaccination, when we all get vaccinated, we'll get back to normal life. But we in Australia have done such a great job. We need to get as many of us through to that time. There's no point stuffing it up right now.

THOMAS ORITI: Okay. Dr Moy, thank you very much for your time this morning.

CHRIS MOY: It's a pleasure.

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