



Flu campaign preparation and best practice

Ellie Roberts, a practice manager on secondment to Londonwide LMCs, looks at why practices need to bite the bullet and get started on their flu campaign now.

The flu campaign appears on the practice meeting agenda; there's a collective sigh around the room. The nurses exclaim 'we can't force them to have it', the GPs protest 'we're busy enough without remembering to jab every patient that walks in the door' and the receptionists smile knowingly as some patients have already been asking about it for months.

It's hard to get motivated about the flu season, and it seems to be back upon us before we've recovered from the previous season's efforts. Whilst I can't promise to make it exciting, I hope the ideas below help make this season ever so slightly less stressful.

Share the load

We found getting every single member of staff involved helped to broaden the number of patients we were talking to about the flu campaign.

Make sure receptionists know who the flu vaccine is offered to and why.

They should be able to explain to a patient why it doesn't matter that they've had it last year, or why 'I've never had flu' is not necessarily a good reason to never have the jab.

Ask the nurses to come to a reception meeting and explain the programme to reception staff, they have the most contact with patients and are well placed to book opportunistic vaccines.

Even if they can't convince Mrs Smith to have a vaccine this year, if they should know what the code to enter on her notes is, and know how to code the ones that are done elsewhere.

Capturing that information early on prevents you wasting time chasing patients who have already said no or had it done at the pharmacy.

Start early and keep accurate records

Preparation early in the season makes the day the vaccines actually arrive much less daunting; although, it does nothing to help actually fit them in the fridge!

Keeping accurate records also means you can allocate resource away from those patients who'll be straight in the door as soon as the stock is in and focus them on those who need a concerted campaign to get them vaccinated.

Interrogate last year's information so you don't waste time and money inviting the first 200 patients who come every year no matter what, and have been asking when the vaccines are in since June.

Create your lists of patients to write to, email or text who are in the most difficult cohorts to reach first; if you're anything like us, they are the newer children's cohorts and younger at-risk patients. This gives you more time to encourage them to attend, or accurately record they have declined, and gives you a clearer idea of how to direct your resources for the rest of the season.

Early preparation also helps with getting all staff involved, as we were cutting out laminated multi-coloured flu bugs (freely downloaded from the vaccine manufacturer's website) ideas we had previously not tried came up; last year we launched a Facebook event for our specific flu clinics.

Make it easier for staff

We also acknowledge that sometimes clinicians and admin staff alike need an extra push to remember flu vaccines, especially at 5.30pm on a rainy Wednesday afternoon.

Do the staff need a prompt when opening a patient's notes that they are due a vaccine? Some clinical systems will enable you to add an extra multi-coloured pop-up, it certainly helped us.

The vaccine schedule can be complex, especially for those not routinely administering vaccines, so making sure there were simple flow charts in each consulting room explaining eligibility criteria and which vaccine to administer was essential. The easier it can be for those already busy consulting, the better.

In the complicated world of general practice we've treated the flu campaign as an opportunity for every single member of the practice team to be involved in achieving something and to be able to say 'I helped with that, isn't this practice great?'

Resources

Most vaccine suppliers provide resources to their customers to support with their flu campaigns for example these from Pfizer.