



Covid vaccination programme - working with patients

Dr Emma Rowley-Conwy of Lambeth LMC shares her experience of how the Covid vaccination programme has reinforced and improved links between GP practices and local communities:

"As clinical director for our PCN I was responsible for setting up our local vaccination site, including getting volunteers to staff it. Most of the vaccinator roles were filled by medical students, but that still left the need for people to meet and direct patients arriving, go through the paperwork and consent process, oversee the post-vaccination observation area and provide any other support required. I worked with our patients participation group chairs to find volunteers, with over 60 people answering our initial call out.

"We have a really interesting, talented and dedicated cross section of society helping us, at various points I have asked volunteers if there's anything they want back and they have all said they just enjoying being involved. Many of them have found working in the vaccination centre has helped with the social isolation of lockdowns or given them purpose while furloughed. One volunteer I know speaks five languages, another says their experience of managing a night club has translated well to managing the flow of people through the centre and the occasional 'tricky customer'. Another volunteer was so effective and committed we hired her as the vaccination centre manager, which freed me up to focus on more of the clinical side of the process, as she took care of a lot of the logistical details.

"Many of the volunteers have gone above and beyond what's asked, for example going out to flyer, put up posters in shops and speak to particular communities ahead of pop-up vaccination clinics. Sometimes it's just the little things, like a patient who came for a vaccination with his son, who wasn't registered with a GP, as quick as a flash a volunteer offered to walk the son round the corner to our practice and get him registered. It's not a core part of the job, they just wanted to help.

"The vaccination programme has shown community general practice at its best, using our relationship with our patients to understand their needs and meet them. I feel that many of the connections built up between patients and GPs will endure beyond the pandemic, and help us to remain informed and responsive into the future."

Catherine Higgins volunteered at Dr Rowley-Conwy's vaccination centre and was latter taken on as site manager:

"I joined the vaccination campaign after Christmas, having received a text from the Patient Participation Group at my surgery asking me to volunteer. I wanted to help out and had been furloughed and subsequently made redundant from my job as a Client Services Co-ordinator.

"Initially I was a marshal, alongside four or five others working on each clinic. This was very enjoyable, all the patients and volunteers were excited about the vaccine and keen to be there. Being the last marshal to see patients before they left the clinic was my favourite role, the stickers were very popular, with some jokingly asking for lollypops as well. We even had one patient in wearing a happy birthday hat which they had modified to say 'Happy Vaccination Day!' "When the PCN decided to employ a site manager for the vaccination centre I applied, was interviewed by Emma and joined the team. I had very little specific healthcare experience but soon hit my stride, managing rotas for the different roles, organising pop up clinics and finding people at short notice to take expiring stock. Just being out of the house every day was a culture shock after so many months of lockdown, but I really enjoy the job in a way that is different to any other I've done. "I've lived in the area for four years, so it was great to meet the volunteers, who were an interesting mix of people from different sectors such as creative industries, traditional office work, students and retirees. With so many people on furlough they were also more varied in age than typical groups of volunteers. We've also been involved with the local community in other ways, for example getting young people to do flyering so they could complete the volunteering element of their Duke of Edinburgh award at a time when lockdown made it difficult to do so."