Letters to the editor

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CORONAVIRUS

Students' vaccine views

Sir, as healthcare workers in priority group 2, dental students have been included in the first phase of the government's vaccine rollout. The Manchester Undergraduate Dental Research Society were interested in dental students' views on the vaccine and distributed a five-question survey on our social media platforms in late January.

We received 127 responses from all the UK dental schools, mostly from the University of Manchester (85 responses). There were ten responses each from the Universities of Sheffield and Birmingham; additional responses from the remaining 13 universities were in single figures. The year groups of participants were relatively evenly spread: BDS1 (26%), BDS2 (13.4%), BDS3 (15.7%), BDS 4 (33.1%), BDS5 (11.8%).

The UK government's assumption, based on previous vaccination programmes, is that around three-quarters of people will take the coronavirus vaccination when offered.¹ Our results show slightly higher rates as, at the time of the survey, 86.6% of dental students planned to have or had already received the vaccine. Of the

remaining students, eight had decided not to take it and nine were undecided. We then asked students to select statements they believed to be true; the results are shown in Table 1.

These results show that despite students agreeing to receive the vaccine, they still have concerns that need addressing. Our final question asked whether students would like more information on the vaccine from their dental school; the majority (72.4%) answered yes. We suggest that dental schools provide reassurance to students' concerns. This could be by signposting to reliable resources or holding question-and-answer sessions. With accurate information based on evidence-based research, dental students can make informed decisions and the vaccine can provide us all with hope that there are better times ahead.

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Reference

1. Institute for Government. Coronavirus vaccine rollout. 2021. Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/coronavirus-vaccine-rollout> (accessed 14 February 2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-021-2731-7>

A one-way ticket to dental care?

Sir, once vaccinated against COVID-19 individuals are given a card as proof of their vaccination. With some airlines planning to only allow passengers to book and board with their vaccination card, will this also serve as a one-way ticket towards dental care allowing patients to be treated without the need for AGP protocols, fallow time, hazmat suits and respirators to be worn? An essence of normality, allowing for a more secure future for the financial aspect of dental practices, as well as providing further opportunities for students or those in postgraduate training? From a public health and patient perspective, the provision of treatment in order to stabilise the oral health of the public can be continued.

It has been opined that those who refuse the vaccine should give up ventilators and intensive care if they catch coronavirus. This prompted me to consider the ethical and practical consequences of immunity passports. Will vaccinated dental patients be prioritised over those who have not been vaccinated? Patients have every right to decline the vaccine; however, is it morally justified to limit access to those opposed to the vaccine? What about those who are severely immunocompromised or individuals with severe allergies who are not currently eligible for the vaccine? There are currently no data on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy.

In hospitals, open bays mean that AGP treatment is prohibited. For students, this limits their exposure to certain complex treatments. Allowing vaccinated patients to be treated in these open bays with AGP treatments will expand their experience. Theatre capacity in dental hospitals is

Table 1 Dental students' responses to whether statements are true

Statement	Respondents
The vaccine may have harmful long-term effects	40
The vaccine may have harmful side effects	32
I do not know enough about the vaccine to make a decision	18
The vaccine has been produced too quickly	13
The vaccine will not work	8
I'm unlikely to become unwell with COVID so I don't need the vaccine	7
The vaccine contains harmful substances	1