PERSONAL ACCOUNT

The vaccine of hope – what it is like working as a COVID-19 vaccinator

By Liyana Esmail, DCT1, Cardiff, UK

For many of us, watching 91-year-old Margaret Keenan be the first person in the world to be given the Pfizer COVID-19 jab was a glimmer of hope. The first vaccine symbolised the beginning of the end, a vision of life without lockdown, without social distancing and a life without living in fear. Health Secretary Matt Hancock even stated that it 'marks the start of the fightback against our common enemy, the coronavirus'.

After watching and reading all about the vaccines the United Kingdom was going to offer, I knew I needed to get involved. Usually, I work as a dentist in the NHS but the idea of being able to directly help overcome COVID-19 was an opportunity I could not resist. As a dentist, I give injections in the mouth every day, so I thought training to vaccinate would be straightforward.

The process of registering to become a vaccinator was challenging, but once contacted, the online learning and training was thorough. The training was intense, involving numerous online modules focusing on the principles of intramuscular injections, anaphylaxis, consent, vaccine storage, national immunisation policy and programmes and detailed teaching on how the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines work.

Following the online teaching, an hour call was arranged followed by face-to-face training over a six-hour shift. During this shift, we were taught how the Pfizer vaccine was stored, how the vaccine was drawn up and the art of giving intramuscular injections.

When arriving in the mass vaccination site, I was overwhelmed by the team. First, you are welcomed by security guards and receptionists, then members of the Royal Air Force in uniform direct you to the main hall and then you are greeted by a host of friendly faces wearing scrubs.

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For the first time in a long time, I was surrounded by lots of people, and it felt good. After being isolated and away from the bustle of a busy daily commute or an overpacked restaurant, it felt unbelievable to be working within such a big team. The team itself is made up of healthcare professionals from all walks of life: community nurses, ICU staff, radiographers, dentists, doctors as well as medical, nursing and dental students. The sense of teamwork and togetherness is unreal, everyone working together for a common goal. The atmosphere itself is remarkable: everyone working seems honoured to just be involved.

When giving the vaccination, the clinical skill is straightforward – the importance lies with gaining valid consent, ensuring the risks and benefits are explained and the ability to answer any questions. I found it surprising to find out how confused patients were regarding how the vaccine worked and the ingredients. Throughout my time working at the mass vaccination centre, I have been asked whether the rumours about the vaccine containing the cells of a human embryo or a tracking device was true! This highlighted to me the misinformation and misconceptions within the general public.

Following this, within my own dental setting I have found there were mixed opinions on whether staff want to receive the vaccine or not. A few members of staff were concerned as they were hoping to conceive in the next few months, whilst others were jumping for joy at the opportunity.

The media has highlighted why there is hesitancy, in particular with BAME communities. The reluctance stems from three main reasons: personal experience, under-representation in clinical trials and a history of being subjects of experiments. Throughout history, there have been abusive practices against minority groups including denying medical treatment on slaves as well as providing treatment without consent and without anaesthesia, as well as the Tuskegee Syphilis study which involved using Black people without their knowledge. In some cases, patients within the BAME community have worried over the religious acceptability and whether the ingredients are halal and in keeping with their beliefs. To try and help, it is important to address patients' concerns, recognise the barriers and to have tailored communications. This will help to correct the misconceptions that present regarding the COVID-19 vaccines. ➤

◀ For the majority, getting the vaccine is a meaningful event, something people are excited for. I have met many patients whose first interaction with another person since March 2020 was with me, having not seen any family or friends or even leaving the house. It put into perspective what sacrifices people have made to protect themselves and their loved ones.

The United Kingdom has set an aim to vaccinate everyone aged 18 years or over by the end of July. As the vaccine has not yet been tested in children, more research is required before they start receiving doses. At the time of writing, over 30 million people have now received their first dose of the vaccine; the UK is now in third place of doses given per 100 residents, following Israel and the UAE.

Overall, I have loved working in the COVID vaccination centres; the job has given me a sense of fulfilment and excitement which is a nice change from treating emergency dental pain patients over the last few weeks. I hope that with continued supply and delivery of vaccines, life can once again return to the 'normal' that we all desire. ■ ✦

BDA UPDATE

British Dental Association (the 'Company')
(Registered in England and Wales with company number 14161)
Annual General Meeting

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Annual General Meeting of the British Dental Association will be held remotely at 19:30 on Thursday 6 May 2021, for transaction of the following business:

1. To receive and consider the audited accounts for the financial year ended 30 September 2020 including the Directors' and auditors' reports, as made available on the BDA website
2. To reappoint BDO Stoy Hayward, LLP ('BDO') as the company's auditors to hold office until the next Annual General Meeting and to authorise the Directors to fix their remuneration
3. To consider and, if thought fit, approve, as a special resolution of the members of the Company, the adoption of the draft articles of association posted on the BDA website as the articles of association of the Company with immediate effect in substitution for and to the entire exclusion of the existing articles of association
4. To confirm the date and venue for the Annual General Meeting in 2022 as determined by the Principal Executive Committee.

All documents are available to view on the BDA website.

DATED 9 April 2021

BY ORDER OF THE PRINCIPAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Registered office:

64 Wimpole Street

London W1G 8YS

NOTE: Information for members who cannot attend the AGM but wish to cast their vote is available on the BDA website. ✦

Notice of death

We are sad to report the death in March 2021 of Michael (Mike) Butterworth. ✦