



Monkfield Medical Practice

Headlines last week spoke of “Covid vaccine by Xmas from GPs”. What does this mean for me?

Whilst we at Monkfield Medical Practice certainly would want to be involved in any vaccination campaign, we don't have any information ourselves yet and contrary to media reports no 'deals' have yet been done, but we expect more information soon.

Will you be getting paid to vaccinate us?

Monkfield Medical Practice hold a contract with the NHS to provide certain services. The money from that contract pays for the building, the heating and electricity, the nurses, receptionists and staff, clinical equipment and a variety of other expenses that go with providing services to patients.

If the government wants GPs to do something new, (e.g. deliver a new vaccine) it will buy that service from the GP to pay for the extra staff, clinics and hours to cover expenses. It is very unlikely that GPs will make a profit out of the Covid vaccine. Based on current information they may make a loss, but recognise that it is the right thing to do for their patients and communities.

But what we don't know, is what we might have to consider stop doing, to free up time to provide this vaccination service, given that we are working at 150% compared with this time last year.

But isn't it just like a flu jab?

No, not by a long stretch.

Flu jabs are delivered in their own syringes, and kept refrigerated. They can safely last in a vaccine fridge for several months. We can keep them and use them, either in dedicated flu clinics or opportunistically if we see you for something else. We can run the clinics a bit like a conveyor belt, as I'm sure many of you will have experienced. We can get a large number of people vaccinated in a very short period of time. People then leave the practice immediately. Once a year, job done.

So what's different about a new Covid vaccine compared with the flu jab?

These new vaccines are not yet ready, and we don't know when they will be. They are completely different. They need to be stored frozen in special dry ice, colder than a home freezer (about -70°C). Surgeries don't have those freezers. So they will be delivered whilst they are defrosting for use. However they can only be stored in a

vaccine fridge for a few days before expiring. They don't come in their own little syringes. We will have to carefully draw them up from a main vial, dilute and mix them for each individual which will probably take from start to finish about 20 minutes, needing two members of staff (one to draw up, one to check - this is established safe practise with these preparations to minimise error). Once the patient has received their Covid-jab they must wait for 15 minutes to ensure no serious reaction -these vaccines are brand new, and whilst there is a huge regulatory framework to ensure their safety, we will have to take extra care. This in itself will be difficult as we have to maintain social distancing and we don't know how quickly these clinics will take place. It will be nowhere near as quick as a flu clinic.

Will this be at my local GP surgery?

To begin with, NHS England thinks that areas will have one central Covid-jab centre. This might be in a local practice. It might be yours, it might not. You may have to travel. How the chosen centre will continue to look after its patients ongoing and urgent health needs, we don't yet know. No details of those plans have been shared yet.

Is it just one jab?

No. You will need two. They will be 3-4 weeks apart but you must not have had any other vaccinations in the previous week.

How many patients will get it the vaccine when it's ready?

Government says it wants 40 million people vaccinated (that's 80 million appointments). Putting that into context, every year there are 40 million A&E attendances and 360 million GP appointments. This is going to take a long time. There are no spare GPs or practice nurses. We don't yet know how we are going to plan for this on top of what we are doing now - managing hundreds of acute and chronic patients every day: on the phone, over video and being brought into the surgery by invitation.

Will it be available by Christmas?

No one knows. But if it is, there will be a very small number of doses and we think the Government might suggest protecting Care Home residents first.

Whatever you read in the paper or online, don't forget - this is going to be very difficult. We need to make sure there is a safe system and a safe vaccine first.

Even when it comes, it won't prevent Covid, it will only make its effects milder. So please bear with us - we are in the dark too.

And there is still every reason to think 'Hands, Space, Safe' for a long time to come.

Keep safe.