

IGPM statement on the NHS vaccination strategy (published 13/12/23)

The Institute of General Practice Management (IGPM) welcomes the release of the NHS England 'NHS Vaccination Strategy' which highlights the crucial role GP Practices play in NHS vaccination programmes. It recognises but does not admit the failings of NHS England and Commissioning organisations in areas reserved to them around IT/Digital and estates for which providers (GP Practices) receive no central funding.

The strategy recognises the need for the 'front door' to vaccination services to be both simple and convenient, however it proposes a system of multiple providers and multiple access points, with information sent to patients from multiple sources.

It highlights the current role of both GP Practices and Community Pharmacies in the delivery of seasonal flu vaccinations but does not recognise that adding Community Pharmacies has been proven as ineffective. In the 5 years between 2015-16, when Pharmacies started delivering flu vaccines and 2020-21 when Covid vaccines were delivered, uptake for season flu was higher in just 1 year (17-18) compared to 2014-15. (Adult flu vaccination coverage, Nuffield Trust.) This strategy is therefore not evidence based as adding multiple providers to the seasonal flu campaign reduced uptake. The strategy also recognises the importance of vaccination in GP Practice sustainability and practices have withdrawn from providing Flu vaccination already, with many more seeing the financial viability reduce.

The current model, as with Primary Care generally, is under-funded and GP surgeries have existing call and recall systems in place, but many do not receive any additional funding to allow outreach and community engagement as proposed and highlighted in case-studies. Commissioners, responsible for overall health in the locality, often do not provide additional funding to Primary Care to support this work. Without investment in GP core contract, more and more practices will close, (20% have closed in the last 10 years) and more communities will lose their convenient local location for vaccination services.

The key improvements outlined in the strategy all relate to areas for which GP Practices receive no core funding and are reliant on Integrated Commissioning Boards to provide – IT/Digital and premises.

We support that move towards the use of more technology and digital solutions. The NHS App already contains functionality for patients to book appointments with their GP practice and many GP Practices already use this. There are other digital solutions that allow eligible patients to be sent a text message and to book the relevant appointment from that message using a smartphone. It is essential that funding is provided across the country for these solutions to be available to all GP Practices where they are not already. The NHS App already allows patients to view their immunisation history and would welcome NHSE making the NHS App more user friendly and this information easier to access.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted how versatile and effective GP Practices are; they were delivering vaccines within 2 weeks of notification, sometimes from additional premises, long before

other vaccination centres and pharmacies could be set up. They delivered most vaccinations, over 70% in the first year, in addition to continuing normal services. The strategy refers to value for money and whilst we welcome the suggestion that Integrated Care Systems should consider how to use other funding streams to support this work, we are concerned there is no commitment to invest more money in vaccination services.

In summary whilst the report recognises many of the challenges and offers some solutions, it does not address the ongoing underfunding and devaluation of GP services in England. Until both revenue and capital funding to Primary Care and GP services in particular is restored to 11% from less than 8% currently of the NHS budget, the effective and efficient improvement of patient services will not be realised.



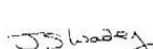
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