

Blog: 11th May, 2021

WE WILL BE DOING COVID VACCINATIONS!

We were told today we can start vaccinations for COVID -19 with the Pfizer Biontech vaccine next week on Thursday 20th May. We won't be advertising this straight away as we do not want to be inundated for the start, not because the vaccination isn't a routine procedure for us- it's easy- but because the elaborate computer procedure that has been set up at enormous cost takes some time to learn and even more time, it seems to use! I do not understand the thinking behind not using our current fully computerised Immunisation Register even if it had to be expanded. We have had to provide an enormous pile of repetitive paperwork, go through hours of computerised training which was difficult to use and frankly extremely insulting to experienced Registered Nurses and qualified Doctors, but it was for a good cause: that is to provide good, safe vaccinations for all our patients.

We will be running an appointment system. It will be set up by Thursday this week. We are not sure how many people we can cope with yet given the inefficiency of the computer system we have to use - which will slow us down a lot compared with doing the flu-jabs. So it will be slow and spaced out in the beginning. Eventually we will be able to manage walk-ins and patients who were coming to see us anyway, and as we come up to speed open to vaccinations for family and friends too. We are keen to vaccinate family groups all together. It makes sense as everyone in the bubble gets done and you are all there to support each other. We will be able to do the second jab three weeks later for people who have had the first shot. Within a week or two we will have our advertising up and open to anyone who chooses to come to us for the vaccination. After all, as a country starting to open up to other countries we need to get as many people vaccinated as soon as possible.

Our patients understand our surgery procedure, but we are planning to be doing our immunisations and the 20 minute waiting time down the back rooms. The surgery we had converted back February last year to a surgery for checking patients with COVID triaging them for an overloaded hospital -and with very grateful thanks did not have occasion to use- will now be a vaccination room with at least two vaccinators working at a time. We should be able to provide more vaccinators for family groups as we get ourselves used to the slow computer programme: experience should help us improve our flow. Our Practice Manager Meriana is office-less, and the nurses have to give up their consultation room so we have two more rooms to stay in for the mandatory 20 minutes after the jab. There will also be sterilisable plastic chairs in our hall/corridors and a bed/plinth for anyone who wants to lie down.

We will be looking for some volunteers next Tuesday May 18th to give us a slow run -through live of the computer programme to make we sure we are recording accurately at all points: I'm sure some patients will not be hard to find - when I hear of people trying to book appointments for vaccines at the hubs and being told they are

number 300 or even 400 in the queue, being given appointments at centres in Mt Wellington or Auckland Central at difficult times, and then when they do get there long queues and waits of 2-4 hours. We hope that doesn't happen to us, and the slow computer system we are stuck with having to use won't help. With fluvax we can have administration staff recording some of it later. We can't do later on this system and that will slow the nurses and doctors helping down.

Initially we will contact our over 65 year olds and people with chronic medical infections and invite them and everyone in their bubble to come in. But this doesn't mean others can't make appointments to come in too. All South Aucklanders are in this current group for vaccinating now as long as they are over 15 [i.e. 16 years at least]. This includes non-residents who haven't even got residency through Immigration yet. We only ask you give us your full name and birthdate and a contact number. We will record address as 'declined'. Immigration, Police, Justice etc. have been specifically excluded from having contact with this independent COVID register so even if there was a sudden change of government it would still be illegal to use this register for anything else, than making sure everyone gets the jab, a booster three weeks later, and does not get more than two jabs which could cause a painful over-reaction by the body, and runs the risk of a major allergic type reaction.

If you are not a patient registered with us, you will need to provide photographic ID- a Passport or Drivers licence, showing your name and birthdate as well as a recognisable photo - otherwise we have to defer your immunisation until you can get these to us. We will ask you, like everyone else if you have allergies and if you ever have had a bad reaction to a vaccination before and everyone has to give at least verbal active consent. We are still arguing whether people have to have written papers to sign and paper and pens can spread infection, and it an enormous lot of extra work to then scan these into the computer [where they languish unread and unnoticed]. It is helpful also to record your GP so evidence of your immunisation can be sent to them. If you are unsure about this, it doesn't matter. The people running the program can link it across to the GP you are registered with, and it will get logged into your notes on their practice management system they run their practice with.

Already about 20 notifications of vaccination a day come in to my practice computer along with my laboratory results and hospital referral letters. When I click on them after reading the immunisation against COVID, it logs immediately into the patient notes under the tag 'Immunisations'. For our patients needing their second immunisation it's easily checked under this system. For those already vaccinated twice it should inform us fast enough not to bother you with further invitations to come and be vaccinated against COVID -19.

It is exciting and I'm just so relieved we can get our patients vaccinated. If you have doubts about the vaccination and need to know more, please don't hesitate to ask us. The commonest question arising relates to vaccinations when a patient is on medications that dampen the immune response which is involved in some illnesses.

Rheumatoid Arthritis and Psoriasis are common examples. While sometimes the answer is easy- for instance those patients on methotrexate who can just need to avoid their weekly dose in the week before they have the vaccination – often the answer is personal to each person, and as doctors here we are in the perfect place to sort out the best solution for our patients. I still don't know why we weren't involved in the vaccinations from the beginning.

For our retired nurses who would like to help we would be very pleased to have you help with overseeing the post vaccination patients, and helping with the recordings. We are not asking you to vaccinate or be alone, but part of a team so even a current APC or vaccinator's certificate isn't required, but older, wise calm heads are what we need. A degree of computer literacy is very helpful. Part-time paid work is what we are offering. If you are interested please discuss it with one of us particularly Meriana Te Tuhi, our practice manager. Just ring and talk with her. We have got no idea of the demand or what staff we will need in addition to what we do have already. We haven't even got a clear idea yet of reimbursement except to know they are paying us far less than the Hubs are costing them per vaccination and that's not even taking into account their enormous setup costs of rent, training of non-vaccinator nurses , security, consultants and setting the reputedly \$38m [so far] computer system....

As long as we all get vaccinated, and get safe I will be happy. Ma te wa, Jacqueline and the team at Tiakina Te Ora.