

Reflections from a Vaccine Centre somewhere near you...

Well Done Britain! Vaccination is proceeding at fast pace. The elderly and health and careworkers I've met are **so** grateful. Because the vaccine gives hope as well as protection. Interesting psychology – normally accessing medical services is a distress purchase (nobody **wants** to go to the doctor, just like nobody wants to spend money on a new washing machine or fridge when the old one breaks). This visit, for the vaccine (Pfizer or Oxford so far) is not just **an** outing – for many it's **The Outing** of the last six months, deprived of company for so long, often celebrated with colours, best clothes and smiles. And often seeing one's own surgery staff – such a joy to see a friendly face when all contacts are now remote first!

The Centres themselves run like well oiled machines, run by PCNs, Hospital and the Mass Centres. I've been so impressed by what I've seen; the planning with military precision, and the enthusiasm. Practice, community and hospital staff, returners and volunteers, including returning doctors, nurses and other professionals. CCG, Council and other support at centres has been much appreciated – even the forces are involved. I worked with a Navy team in one venue.

What have I learnt or remembered?

- The value of preparation (the Government ordering vaccines early, the support of science, the ability of people to make things happen)
- The value of great management (National, Somerset Strategic, Practices, PCNs, Hospital, Major Centres)
- The value of team-work, and dedication of staff and volunteers
- The importance of human contact
- 'The Outing' brings relief and hope, and immense gratitude
- PCNs are seeing large numbers of people face to face – the reunions are like old friends meeting
- We're so good in Britain at putting ourselves down, reflected in national media, whereas our friends who grew up or have lived abroad can recognize how fortunate we are (I met people born in Kenya, India, Sweden and elsewhere)

And

- That staff can and sometimes will exhaust themselves, before learning the importance that structure and planning must permit relief and time off. None of us are invincible or superhuman.
- That some people know their supplements, take Vitamin D (as advised), C and, and the older generation still use Cod Liver Oil (I do too – no comments on my age please..)
- That most people don't take any of these, especially my own tribe of health professionals!

So what message would I share from my interest in health? Let's have a quick look at supplements, Vitamins D, and C

"A healthy British diet gives you all you need" is unfortunately not the full story – although of course the best possible source of most vitamins and nutrients is from fresh food.

Even the Department of Health now advise Vitamin D for six months of the year. Why? D is well known for bone health and calcium metabolism – but is now known to act as a pro-hormone essential in many cellular processes and support of immune function. No test needed to check your levels – if you live in Britain, they are low most of the year! Why? Vitamin D is made in our skin only exposed to sunlight of sufficient strength (think sun higher in sky – too low and the UV rays are filtered out). So everyone needs supplements all winter for optimal function. Even in summer, many people get insufficient sun exposure to maintain decent levels, due to work indoors, among other reasons. If your skin contains melanin pigment (think BAME) - you will almost certainly be deficient. What dose? DoH recommend 10 micrograms (400 units) a day – self purchase for the great majority of us (as we do our own food). That may be just enough to top up and prevent rickets or osteomalacia, however

toxicity is virtually unknown – so unless you've always had high dose supplements, spend time outdoors in summer, and fly to winter sun holidays, then a month of higher dose (4000 units, 100 micrograms) will lift levels. All pharmacies and health stores sell the 10 microgram, some sell an intermediate at 25 (100 = 4x25), and the 4000 /100 are available to order.

Vitamin C minimum recommended dose is 60 mg a day, which is sufficient to prevent scurvy (think lime juice, and 'Limeys' – British sailors who used the fruit to prevent the scurvy which devastated crews on the long ocean voyages of slow sailing ships). However, many people teeter on the edge of deficiency, especially if the immune system is challenged (or smoke – each cigarette wipes out 25mg of Vitamin C). Think 500mg or a gram a day – personally I take the powder, as there's nothing else in it, dissolved in hot water, then followed by some food to ensure acid rinsed from mouth. Powder available from some health shops (best when on offer), and is also used in baking. Natural sources are fruit and vegetables, however they are often picked unripe before C levels have risen to optimum levels

So how can we help ourselves and our friends? Just ask, are you taking Vitamin D (especially the elderly and those of us with darker skin) – and if not, go and get some! And do get your vaccine when available and advised.

Thankyou NHS and Government for the foresight of thinking ahead!

Go Well! Andrew Tresidder 1.2.21