

Vaccination as a condition of deployment case study: Care Through the Millennium

Jane Nash, HR Director at Care Through the Millennium (CTTM), spoke with us about how the organisation has managed to introduce vaccination as a condition of deployment, and how they've encouraged staff to get the vaccine since its inception.

Care Through the Millennium

Care Through the Millennium (CTTM) was established in the late 80s, beginning with one care home catered at providing support for older people. Since then, the organisation has grown to provide care and support for people with a learning disability and mental health illness. In the space of 15 years, the organisation has grown from supporting around 20 vulnerable people and 30 staff members to supporting over 100 vulnerable individuals, and around 350 members of staff.

Hope after devastation

At the very start of the pandemic one of CTTM's homes had an outbreak of COVID-19, which did unfortunately result in a loss of lives, which Jane tells us was of course devastating for everybody involved.

When this home was offered the vaccine – being one of the first groups eligible for it – Jane explains that the uptake was very high, which she believes was because the team had seen and experienced first-hand the devastation which covid can cause.

Jane tells us that right away over 85% of staff were queuing to have the vaccine in that particular service. As such Jane explains that within that home, they didn't have to do much to encourage uptake.

The small percentage of staff in that service who weren't initially certain about whether to get the vaccine were primarily younger members of the team, and Jane says that they worked closely with this group to communicate expert information to them from trusted sources such as the NHS.

All the organisation's directors and registered managers were quick to get their vaccine, and Jane feels this helped to encourage other staff to do the same and eased concerns about any potential risks or side effects of the vaccine.

It wasn't long before 100% of staff at this service had been vaccinated.

Sharing from experts

For CTTM one of the key solutions to promoting uptake to staff who did have concerns over the vaccine, was providing information from external expert sources.

Jane tells us that they found the communications from British healthcare professional Professor Jonathan Stafford Nguyen Van-Tam MBE particularly beneficial and pointed their staff to his webinars for clearly communicated insights. The team also have access to an in-house consultant psychiatrist and staff were able to speak to him about their concerns over the concept of getting a vaccination.

Jane explains that CTTM also took a strict line on making sure that misinformation and conspiracy theories about the vaccine were not spread around the organisation, and that they communicated this with staff from very early on to discourage this.

She explains it was important that this was “brought to the forefront and dealt with appropriately and shut down.”

Dealing with resistance

Whilst the one home quite quickly reached 100% uptake, across their other services there was some more resistance from staff who were unsure.

Jane explains the first step to managing this was in having conversations and discussing individually with each team member their concerns, as well as conducting a risk assessment with them discussing the risk they could be at from COVID-19 and how the vaccine could help protect them and the vulnerable individuals who they support.

Another important step was making colleagues who'd already had the vaccine available for those who had not, to talk to about any concerns.

The team also made sure to provide plenty of support for staff getting vaccinated, making sure they were able to take time off to attend their appointment and to recover from any side effects. They gave everyone who had the vaccine an extra day of annual leave – which did improve uptake by around 10%.

Ultimately, CTTM discovered that while some staff had concerns about getting the vaccine, they said that if it did become a condition of deployment then they would have it.

At the same time, the team were hearing from the people they support and their family members, saying that they didn't want to be supported by someone who hadn't been vaccinated.

This led to making the difficult decision early in the year to make vaccination a 'reasonable request' that unless a staff member had a medical exemption then they would need to be vaccinated.

Making the vaccine a condition of deployment

Staff were given until 1 April to get their first vaccine. It had already been added as a requirement for new members of staff.

Some staff did choose not to get the vaccine and did have to leave the organisation. Jane explains that while they were sad to lose these team members, they respect everyone's personal decision. She says:

"We absolutely respect it's a personal choice, however having a learning disability increases the risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19.

"That's what heavily influenced our decision to say to staff we need you to do this, and we firmly believe it was a reasonable request because we wanted to protect the people who we support."

Jane also explains that they told all staff who resigned that if they did change their mind and decide to have the vaccine they would of course be welcomed back with open arms.

Now that vaccines have been made a condition of deployment for frontline care home staff across England, Jane explains that the Government guidelines which have since been released very much mirrors the steps they took at the time.

The organisation is now in a position where 99% of staff are vaccinated, where those who aren't have an exemption.

Be open and don't be worried

CTTM's advice to other care providers about managing vaccination as a condition of deployment is to focus on open discussions, encourage plenty of communication about the topic, and don't be worried about tackling the spread of misinformation from any colleagues which could be causing challenges and influencing other colleagues.



Jane does highlight that it was a very difficult decision as they didn't want to lose any team members but knowing the devastating impact which COVID-19 can have on people, they feel it is the right step to take.