



Vaccination as a condition of deployment case study: HC-One

Stephen Butterworth, Executive Director for Operations at HC-One, shared with us how the organisation has managed the process of making the COVID-19 vaccination a condition of employment and how they've encouraged uptake among staff.

HC-One

HC-One, The Kind Care Company, is the UK's leading provider of residential, nursing, memory care for those living with dementia and specialist care services.

With over 300 care homes, over 20,000 colleagues and over 14,000 residents throughout the UK, HC-One are one of the largest care operators, creating a positive and home-from-home care service. HC-One strives to be the first-choice care home in every community for those looking for the very best care, and for colleagues seeking a long-term career delivering the kindest and highest quality care.

The organisation's core value is kindness, and this has been a key consideration in their communications around making the COVID-19 vaccination a condition of employment.

Challenges of the pandemic

Stephen says: "In the early days of the pandemic, it was so tough because we didn't really know what we were dealing with, as no-one did really. We were one of the first big providers to close our homes to visitors to try and protect our residents.

"We've just been overwhelmed by the dedication of our staff. Even though there was so much anxiety at the time, our staff came into work day-in, day-out to care for our residents and their courage and resilience has just been amazing."

Speaking of how challenging the past 18-months has been for their staff, Stephen says that the organisation has placed a big focus on colleagues' mental wellbeing and providing support.

Introducing the vaccine

Stephen says that the primary initial reaction among the team upon the release of the COVID-19 vaccine was one of excitement. He tells us "We saw this as a way to



protect our residents and our colleagues, so there was a real excitement in the organisation.

“Obviously being in the care sector we were one of the first groups to be able to benefit from the vaccine, so most of our staff were happy to be able to do that and protect the residents who they support, themselves, and their families.”

Once the vaccine was available, HC-One were quick to start communication with staff about the vaccination programme to encourage uptake and help overcome any obstacles.

The team have also introduced a consultation with colleagues about how to implement making the COVID-19 vaccination a condition of employment.

Information sharing

Stephen highlights that at the initial provision of the vaccine, there was still a lot unknown about the vaccine and so a key focus for their communications and leadership teams was to communicate information and answers from trusted sources about the vaccination and what to expect. The fact that colleagues' friends and family had mostly not yet had the vaccination meant that there was some natural trepidation about having it.

The HC-One team created a range of different content across different channels to help support staff in finding out more about the vaccination, including running webinars, sharing documents with latest vaccines updates, and sharing NHS and Government guides about the safety of the vaccination.

The webinars included question and answer sessions, where common queries from colleagues were answered. The team also created a video of colleagues who had initially been nervous about getting the vaccine, sharing their experience.

Creating a taskforce

The organisation had a COVID-19 team in place from the start of the pandemic, and once the vaccine became available, they also created an additional vaccination taskforce. This was led by Stephen along with colleagues from HR, the COVID-19 team, health and safety, and communications.

As well as information sharing, the taskforce also undertook some practical operations to support staff around the vaccine. This included supporting staff in getting to the vaccine clinics, accompanying more nervous staff to their



appointments, and reviewing HC-One's policy around sickness leave to support any staff who had an adverse reaction to the vaccine.

The team also ran one-to-one sessions for colleagues who were more apprehensive about the vaccine, allowing the individual the chance to talk to their manager and the HR team directly about their worries and challenges around the vaccine.

Stephen says: "Long before we went down the path of making the COVID-19 vaccine a condition of employment, our focus was on supporting, encouraging and educating.

"We wanted to come back to the national guidelines and sources that were respected and signpost our colleagues to the right sources so they could do their own research and reassure themselves."

The team also reached out to their colleagues' communities and local leaders, such as faith leaders, as Stephen explains that some faith groups may have had concerns about the vaccine related to their faith.

He says: "We wanted to work with local community leaders and faith leaders, and really work in partnership to help reassure our colleagues on the safety of the vaccine."

Positive impact

Across the combined methods of communication, information sharing and practical support the HC-One team did see a positive impact on uptake of the vaccine.

Stephen tells us: "I don't think it was one specific initiative that was the game-changer in encouraging the majority of colleagues to have the vaccine, it's been a journey to reach such high uptake levels."

At the time of speaking around 91.5% of the HC-One team had been vaccinated but this has continued to rise and currently 93.8% of colleagues have received their first dose of the vaccine. Stephen also adds that colleagues became more confident as people across the wider society also started to have the vaccine.

Making the COVID-19 vaccination a condition of employment

Speaking of their decision to make the COVID-19 vaccine a condition of employment, which came ahead of the national legislation in England, and has also been put in place across HC-One in Wales and Scotland, Stephen says: "What it



came down to was our responsibility to our residents, and we've got to do everything [to support them].

“We look after some of the most vulnerable people in society and we felt that this was one more thing we could do to protect our residents. We as an organisation feel we have a responsibility to do everything we can to protect our residents, and protect our colleagues as well.

“We know that if COVID-19 gets into a home with a significant number of people who aren't vaccinated the impact could be massive. That is what really unites us as an organisation behind that position, our single priority is to protect residents.”

Of course, Stephen explains it still wasn't an easy decision. He says: “It was a difficult decision because we expected it to have an impact on some of our loyal colleagues who had made a decision not to have the vaccine. However, what gave us the confidence it was the right decision to make is that it's about protecting our residents.

“We therefore made the decision prior to the regulations being brought forward in England, and that's why we're making this a condition of employment for all HC-One colleagues, not only for those in England but colleagues in Wales and Scotland too, as well as those in our Support Centre.”

When it came to communicating HC-One's decision to staff, the organisation wrote a letter directly to all colleagues to ensure everyone was reached individually, as well as communicating the update at their quarterly company call and through the organisation's social media channels.

The initial reaction among the team was that it wasn't unexpected. Stephen tells us: “It didn't come as a surprise to the vast majority of colleagues that we'd made the decision, as I think colleagues knew how important we felt it was that they were vaccinated, given all the initiatives over previous months to encourage all colleagues to be vaccinated.”

Stephen does say there are of course some colleagues who are upset with the decision and who are not yet vaccinated. Stephen explains they're working closely with those colleagues to find a solution, saying: “We want all colleagues to stay with us.

“The last thing we want to do is lose colleagues, especially given their dedication and resilience over such a tough period. Naturally some of our colleagues are disappointed in our decision, as there are colleagues who have chosen not to have the vaccine and we completely respect their decision, it’s a personal choice.”

Preparing for the future

HC-One have updated their HR policies to state that all new applicants to the organisation must be fully vaccinated or willing to be vaccinated, and that existing staff must also be fully vaccinated. In addition to this, HC-One have included within their COVID-19 vaccination policy for staff to be willing to have any booster vaccinations should this be required in the future.

Looking ahead to the impact which making the COVID-19 vaccination a condition of employment may have on staffing, HC-One have been analysing the areas where vaccine uptake has been lowest and have already been adding additional support to these homes to prepare if any staff do have to leave due to not being vaccinated.

Focus on communication

HC-One’s advice to other social care providers would be to really focus on communication and having discussions with colleagues. Stephen also says that providing guidance from official sources is key. He says: “Our approach from day one has always been to support and listen.

“People who join this sector come in because they have a passion for caring for people and that has been key in HC-One’s decision making, that we’re doing it for the right reasons and that is protecting those we are privileged to care for.”