



Dr Joanne Atkinson; Prof Debbie Porteous; Prof John Unsworth and Dr Caroline Jeffery

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Northumbria staff on frontline supporting the Covid vaccination roll-out

Nursing academics from Northumbria University have been delivering Covid-19 vaccinations to priority patients, as part of the University's continued efforts to support the frontline response to the pandemic.

Five senior academics from the University's Faculty of Health and Life Sciences worked as part of a team who vaccinated more than 300 people over the age of 80 for East Durham Primary Care Network, last weekend.

They were the first volunteers from Northumbria to begin working on the vaccination programme after the University pledged to provide staff and students to support the regional vaccination campaign.

As one of the largest providers of health education and training in the north of England, Northumbria University has been working closely with the local NHS Trusts, primary care partners and Health Education England to look at ways in which it can contribute to the vaccination programme.

It is providing up to 12 working days for staff to volunteer in a variety of roles and is delivering a learning package to upskill the vaccination workforce. Students have also been given the opportunity to sign up for bespoke placements to support the roll-out.

The academics worked at a GP-led vaccination centre in Durham which involved patients of [Dr Caroline Jeffery](#), who is a managing partner at a local GP surgery and a senior lecturer in the University's Department of [Nursing, Midwifery and Health](#).

Although all have extensive nursing experience, they each undertook full Covid training before meeting patients. This included learning how to meticulously mix the vaccine under the supervision of qualified pharmacists and how to respond in case anyone had an anaphylactic reaction.

[Dr Joanne Atkinson](#), Head of the Department of [Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing](#), is a registered nurse who specialised in cancer and palliative care. She described the experience of giving vaccines as “one of the greatest privileges of my life.”

She explained: “Having spoken with Caroline we were acutely aware of the issues that GP surgeries are facing in providing the staffing resource needed to deliver the vaccine to their patients. It is a massive logistical effort, and the most precious thing is getting staff who can vaccinate.

“As a registrant with experience of this, I felt it was my moral duty to contribute. This vaccine is our route out. I couldn't sit and do nothing when I have skills that can help.

“It really was the best experience,” she said. “I can't describe what it was like.

The emotions shown by the patients receiving their vaccine moved me to tears.

“They were all over 80; many of them had been shielding and hadn’t left their home since March. They were crying with joy and relief at finally receiving the vaccine and were so relieved and grateful at the prospect of finally being able to see their children, grandchildren and friends again once they are able to do so safely and within the restrictions.

“We are all looking forward to returning for our next shift.”

As a senior lecturer at Northumbria University, [Dr Caroline Jeffery](#) contributes to research and teaching on the Advanced Clinical Practice programme. She is also a managing partner at Cheveley Park Medical Centre in Durham. She said that the roll-out of the vaccine campaign is unlike anything her practice has had to do before.

“We are working in partnership with four other surgeries to deliver the vaccine to those most at risk in our community. Because the Pfizer vaccine is quite fragile and needs to be carefully stored and handled, we have had to find a centre we can all work from to keep the vaccine stable and deliver it to our patients.

“The logistical challenge has been enormous as we have to coordinate running and staffing the centre as well as the daily operations of our own practices. In addition, we can only administer the vaccine when we have stocks so there is a huge amount of juggling to make sure we can get our patients in quickly when deliveries are confirmed.”

Dr Jeffery praised the support that the University had provided by allowing staff time to volunteer to support the Covid response.

“Each GP surgery is responsible for running the centre on different days and so, for us, the support from the University to provide staff on a volunteering basis has been an absolute godsend.

“As the academics are all trained nurses it means they are more than qualified to look after the vaccination sessions and we can keep most of our clinicians in the practice and continue to run a fairly normal service for our

patients.”

Dr Jeffery encouraged as many people as possible to register to support the vaccine roll-out.

“There would literally be a job for anybody, no matter how much or little time they can spare,” she said. “There are so many roles, such as people to man the car parks, ensure the queues are managed, sit with the patients for fifteen minutes after they have received their vaccine to look after them and coordinate appointment slots and so on.

“It is hugely worth it. Everyone wants to get out of this and see their loved ones and get back to doing the things they enjoy. We really need to get everyone vaccinated as quickly as we can.”

[Professor Debbie Porteous](#), Head of the Department of [Nursing, Midwifery and Health](#), was also a member of the team delivering the vaccines. She said: “The University has been working in partnership with our regional and national health organisations on the frontline response to the pandemic. Since day one, our staff and students have played essential roles supporting the NHS and other partners, and we have offered our equipment, expertise and facilities for use wherever possible.

“Now that vaccines are available and being rolled out, we knew we had to do our utmost to help in this massive national challenge. We put out a call to action to all staff within the Faculty to support the regional vaccination workforce team and I am honoured to say that the response was overwhelming.

“We are delighted to be able to contribute to the effort in a way which is so significant and which makes such a difference, not only at a national level, but as we saw first-hand, it also makes a huge difference at the individual patient level too.”

Anyone wanting to support the vaccine roll-out can do so by registering to [join the NHS Covid-19 vaccine team](#). A variety of paid and volunteer roles are available.

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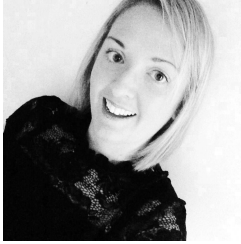


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