VACCINATION VOLUNTEERS

Covid-19: volunteers cannot be outsourced

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A spokesperson from the Department of Health and Social Care said that there were no delays in accrediting volunteers to help with the covid-19 vaccination programme. Evidently NHS staff have time to vaccinate 30 million people in a few weeks without our help. I worry that the real reason for the stonewalling is that unpaid volunteers cannot be outsourced to private companies.

Having retired in 2019, I applied to the General Medical Council last March and am currently reregistered with a licence to practise under the Coronavirus Act. After completing numerous forms and probity declarations, I contacted local trusts about specialist work for which I might be more of an asset than a liability. Multiple phone calls followed, mostly from different Serco employees asking the same questions and finally offering me (as a 70 year old former geriatrician) intensive care work in Nightingale hospitals.

In early December I contacted my local primary care network and completed online vaccinator training. I have heard nothing for six weeks but am dreading further calls from outsourcing companies offering shifts in giant car park vaccination centres at the other end of the country.

Clearly vaccinators must be competent—especially while the surging “infodemic” saps public confidence—but much of the red tape is avoidable and probably generated by the perceived need to give volunteers a paid contract. I doubt if I am alone in feeling more willing to help if I were not being paid.

The United Kingdom has an opportunity to show the world how a scientifically based, professionally led NHS, supported by massive voluntary effort and public goodwill, can meet this huge public health challenge. Yet up to now the government has seemed convinced that “professional services” companies can do a better job, using low paid staff with minimal training. It would be unfair to allow the NHS to compete with them using unpaid volunteers. We can only hope that they are not applying this philosophy to the covid-19 vaccination programme.

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Full response at: https://www.bmj.com/content/372/bmj.n13/rr-2.


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