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Why did you decide to undertake this study?

In autumn 2020, the expansion of the eligible cohorts for the flu vaccination programme and later, the introduction of the COVID vaccination programme highlighted a significant workforce capacity gap in our region. At the same time, because of the new restrictions caused by the pandemic, many FD training practices were struggling to offer more than 3 days/week of work to the FDs. We had to do something to help, but these were uncharted waters and there was no precedent in terms of governance arrangements. Fortunately, our team was led by a dental public health consultant with a dual role as screening and immunisations lead. We also had excellent relationships already established with key partner organisations including HEE, NHS England, Y&H Academic Health Sciences Network, etc.

Did any of the results surprise you?

Not surprised that dentists can vaccinate. The surprising bit was around the ability of different organisations and systems to work together. Some were innovators and early adaptors who jumped on the free offer whilst others needed a little bit more support. Colleagues in the wider healthcare sector are not always aware of the skillset of dental teams. Fortunately, we had the support of some senior colleagues who understood the situation and helped us drive change.

What do you think the next steps should be considering your findings?

Dental access has to be the main priority for the moment. But in a post-pandemic world, there are lessons to be learned in working across traditional professional boundaries especially with the increasing role of Integrated Care Systems. We are looking to further explore opportunities around addressing the barriers between medical and dental teams as we cannot talk about health without considering oral health as an integral part of it.