

Covid Vaccination, Emsworth

by Dr Philip Tibbs, GP in Emsworth, 1983 to 2014

I finally retired from being a doctor in 2015 at the age of 60 and looked forward to a retirement of travel and leisure. I certainly did not believe I would ever practice medicine again and the Covid-19 pandemic was a surprise for everyone. In April 2020, all doctors who had retired in the previous five years were written to by the General Medical Council and advised that unless we objected, we were back on the register as licensed GPs under emergency Covid powers.

In the early days, no one was really sure what would happen and although intensive care units were under extreme pressure, the NHS coped and did not need either retired doctors or the large, planned Nightingale hospitals. In fact, GPs seemed to be less busy during the early stages of the pandemic as most consultations were on the telephone and everyone tried not to use medical services unless essential.

In December 2020 a key change in dealing with Covid appeared. I took my 99 year old father Michael, a naval veteran of the Second World War, to be the first person in the South East and, for a time, the oldest person in the world to Queen Alexandra Hospital for his first Covid-19 vaccination. There was due ceremony. He was vaccinated by the chief nurse and was then interviewed by the press

and TV. Dad encouraged everyone to follow his example and have the jab.

Just before Christmas, the Emsworth vaccination centre opened in the Baptist Church chosen because it provided plenty of space, car parking and transport links. With some apprehension, many retired doctors and nurses decided that their turn had now come to be useful – myself and my ex GP wife Caroline included. We have now vaccinated (as of June 2021) 44,000 people at the church and have a wonderful team spirit with returned and active doctors, returned and active administration staff and amazing volunteers. Our volunteers make the clinic run smoothly by helping at receptions, directing those to receive vaccines, supervising the post immunisation wait following Pfizer vaccine and possibly the bravest job when we were vaccinating the oldest cohort was to supervise the parking of drivers in their 90s.

We have been able to vaccinate about 1000 people a day in the Baptist Church – definitely enough to have a real impact on the disease locally. At the moment with discussion of a third dose for the most vulnerable and vaccination of teenagers, there is no end in sight. I have found it a fulfilling occupation.



Michael Tibbs receiving his first Covid-19 jab. He received his booster jab in late September just two months prior to his 100th birthday.



Residents waiting to be vaccinated at Emsworth Baptist Church

Photos: The News

Dr Tibbs added: The pleasure of meeting old friends from when I was in practice, the feeling of being useful and recalling medical knowledge which does not seem to have completely left my brain when called upon for advice was very rewarding.



The final Covid vaccinations at the Emsworth Baptist Church were on 21st August 2021 after which there was a well earned wrap-up party. In just nine months the selfless volunteers had seen some 66,000 people come through the doors. In the above photo, courtesy of The Border Times and Chris Pearsall, volunteers raise a glass in celebration
