



Plenary III

Rising to the Challenge of COVID-19: A UK Primary Care Perspective on COVID-19 Research and Vaccine Delivery



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Professor Philip Evans is an academic GP and until recently Senior Partner in St Leonard's Practice in Exeter, UK (where he practised for 31 years as a GP). He is the Associate Professor of General Practice & Primary Care of the University of Exeter Medical School. He is also the NIHR Clinical Research Network (CRN) Specialty Cluster Lead, based at Kings College in London (where he is an Honorary Reader) and CRN National Specialty Lead for Primary Care. Phil has had a long-standing research interest in continuity of care in general practice as well as prediabetes/type 2 diabetes. During the COVID-19 pandemic he has been responsible for primary care engagement within the NIHR CRN, contributing to the delivery of COVID-19 primary care studies, including the COVID-19 primary care vaccine studies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the United Kingdom, both in terms of the impact on public health, but also the impact on healthcare. The UK government, early in the pandemic, identified research as being a key component of the UK response. This presentation will describe the steps that were taken at a national level across the UK to rapidly develop and deliver important and potentially game-changing clinical research studies across all sectors of healthcare, as well as social care and public health.

A vital component of the UK response through the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) was engagement with GPs and other primary care professionals in research studies. The setting up of a UK-wide platform study for community treatments of COVID-19 (PRINCIPLE) was a key step in the primary care research response, especially the virtual trial delivery that was needed in the pandemic. In addition, several of the large clinical trials for potential vaccine candidates were studied in a GP setting, using innovative models of trial delivery. These will be described in detail in the presentation.

Finally, the mass vaccination campaign using deployed vaccines, designed to vaccinate most of the UK population, commenced in December 2020. GPs and primary care colleagues (pharmacists) have been instrumental in the delivery of the UK vaccine rollout. This unprecedented campaign has demonstrated the importance of primary care in the delivery at scale of life-saving public health interventions, such as COVID-19 vaccination.