



COVID-19 Vaccine – supporting the clinical trials in Scotland

Participant: Sheryl Black, Sheltered Housing Manager at Hanover Court, Banchory.

Background:

The programme to vaccinate keyworkers and the general public against Covid-19 began in December 2020. Since the roll-out of the vaccine, more than a million people in Scotland have received their first dose and more than 100,000 have been given their second dose.

Hanover's Housing with Care, Enhanced and Factoring staff have been part of the highest priority groups to receive the vaccine since the roll-out started in December.

To reach the required safety standards, pharmaceutical companies have invested in extensive research and development of the new vaccines, including conducting clinical trials with volunteers.



Staff experience: Sheryl Black, Sheltered Housing Manager at Hanover Court, Banchory.

Sheryl Black is part of Hanover's Enhanced housing team, overseeing the Hanover Court development in Banchory. Like many staff, Sheryl has been one of the first to receive the Covid-19 vaccine in Scotland, but a chance encounter on social media led to a life-changing opportunity, **as Sheryl explains:**

“In September 2020, when the talk of a Covid-19 vaccine was just starting, I noticed a Facebook post from an old university friend. The status update announced that the NHS were looking for volunteers to trial NOVAVAX, a possible new vaccine against Covid-19.

Suddenly it made me think of all the vulnerable people who were self-isolating and had no chance to meet or talk to anyone because of the restrictions imposed upon them. That really made my decision for me and I applied for the clinical trial immediately.

The registration process was simple and involved a single telephone interview with a nurse from the local hospital. The NOVAVAX trial date was arranged and I went to the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary for my first appointment.

My colleagues were really supportive of my decision and that gave me the confidence to take part in the trial - there was no real fear.

Every step of the clinical trial was explained clearly by an appointed nurse and I received a health examination at my first appointment. I was not the only participant in the trial and we were instructed that some people would receive the trial vaccine and some would receive a placebo.

I received an injection at my first appointment and I was instructed how to use an app on my mobile phone to keep a vaccine diary. Over the next 7 days I updated the diary with any symptoms or side effects from the trial. I was asked to complete questions about any pain or discomfort that I felt and I also submitted daily temperature readings. I had no idea if it was a placebo or the real thing.

A month later, I returned to the hospital for my second appointment which included blood tests and another injection. The doctors and nurses were really friendly and talked me through the whole process, it made me feel really good to be part of the clinical trial. I would have two further appointments where the blood tests were repeated and I was eager to know the results.

I had many opportunities to speak to the staff at the NOVAVAX trial and although they couldn't go in to detail, they were starting to see encouraging signs from previous trials.

Receiving the vaccine:

Shortly after I completed the clinical trial, word quickly spread that a new vaccine had been approved. The staff from the NOVAVAX study contacted straight away to reassure me about the new vaccine and that the NHS would be contacting key workers soon.

I was excited about the prospect of receiving the vaccine, but I wanted to know if I had received a dose of NOVAVAX or a placebo during my trial. I contacted the doctor at the Royal Infirmary who confirmed that I had been given the placebo after all.

I was disappointed that I hadn't received NOVAVAX during the trial, as the early tests showed that it was very successful at fighting all strains of the virus. However, I'm proud to have been able to take part in the study and to have been offered my vaccination so quickly, due in no small part to the support I received from colleagues.

The registration process was quick and easy and my appointment was back at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, where the clinical trial had taken place just a few months previously.

Once again, the set up was well organised and the process was clearly explained by the nurse. All staff in the vaccination centre kept a three-metre distance and I was able to wait in a large waiting area, before going through to receive the first dose of my vaccine. The staff put my mind at ease and showed a great interest in the fact I had been taking part in the NOVAVAX trial.

My experience of both the vaccination trial and receiving the first dose of the vaccine have both been positive. I strongly recommend that anyone who is offered the new Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccines to take the opportunity, as it will help to protect you and others from the virus.

I have agreed to continue as a participant in the trial, as I've realised the importance of collecting new data about the placebo and the real vaccine and how this will help to continue fighting the Covid-19 virus.”