

Developing a pharmacy COVID-19 vaccination service in Norway

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Background information

A national pharmacy influenza vaccination service for the private market was established a year before the covid-19 pandemic started in Norway. Other vaccines, prescribed by doctors, was also administered in pharmacies. The pharmacists obtained prescribing rights for flu vaccines in September 2020, but pharmacies were not included when the national covid-19 vaccination program was developed and decided by national authorities.

Purpose

The Norwegian Pharmacy Association and the pharmacies initiated several activities to include pharmacies as a provider of covid-19 vaccination and to establish models for cooperation between pharmacies and the municipalities responsible for providing the vaccination program locally.

Method

A close collaboration between the Norwegian Pharmacy Association, the three vertically integrated pharmacy chains, as well as the hospital pharmacies, was established. A working group developed a training program for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, as well as standard operation procedures for the service. The Norwegian Pharmacy Association were at the same time lobbying towards the Ministry of Health and Care Services, the National Institute of Public Health and The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities at the same time as dialogue with the municipalities started. All activities aimed to include pharmacies as a national vaccination provider.

Results

A pharmacy covid-19 vaccination service with standardized training and procedures was successfully established in very short time. A digital health service platform (Helseboka) that fulfilled the pharmacies' needs for organizing and record keeping the vaccination service provided, was implemented. The pharmacists in community pharmacies where authorized to prescribe covid-19 vaccines in March 2021. Vaccination in Oslo started in May 2021, and 22 pharmacies administered 15 000 doses in a few weeks.

In December 2021, a system for reimbursement was introduced, and a national template for vaccine collaboration between municipalities and pharmacies was published. From January to June 2022, 208 pharmacies administered 50 000 doses in close collaboration with the municipalities. Feedback from people vaccinated in pharmacies was very positive, and pharmacy staff was also very positive to the new service introduced.

Conclusion

In 2021 the pharmacy chains and the Norwegian Pharmacy Association managed to develop and introduce a national standardized pharmacy covid-19 vaccination service successfully. The pharmacies and their staff are now experienced vaccinators and prepared to contribute in other national vaccination programs as well.