

Davis French & Associates helps out

By Dr Greg French – April 15, 2020

I'm incredibly proud of the DF&A Laboratory Team as we have just completed our first batch of COVID-19 tests taken from staff at our local GP Medical Centre over the Easter holiday.

After spending the last 2 years building a laboratory and recruiting scientists to be able to test for mould contamination using the very latest DNA extraction, q-PCR amplification and 3rd Generation DNA sequencing technology we were all set to launch it to the insurance claims marketplace when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and our plans were put on-hold.

Rather than sit on our hands and wait for 'normality' to return we decided to see if we could use our new facilities and skills to help out in any way we could. Within 2 weeks we had sourced the necessary swabs, RNA extraction reagents and RT q-PCR test kits to the same specification as Public Health England and the NHS are using. Deciding to test the efficacy of our test methods we went out into the outside environment and swabbed the keypads on 15 ATM cash machines. Rather disturbingly we found 6 keypads had definite evidence of the COVID-19 virus on them, i.e. 40%! We reported this finding to PHE but to date we've had no response. Anyway our results go to show why you really need to wash your hands, (preferably with soap and water), and not touch your face!

Last week we got in touch with the COVID-19 Volunteer Testing Network, (www.covid19-testing.org), which is a network of little independent laboratories who have volunteered to help carry out COVID-19 testing to supplement the Governments ambition to get to 100,000 tests a day. The Network is being funded by Mike Fischer of SBL who has put up £1M to pay for free tests to be carried out on frontline staff in GP Medical Centres, Hospices and Care Homes. Mike is paying for the reagents and test kits while the laboratories are providing the lab facilities and staff costs for free.

On Thursday last week we sent out our first batch of swabs to our local GP Medical Centre who were then able to test staff who were self isolating either because they were showing symptoms of the virus or were living with someone who was showing symptoms. On Friday we collected the swabs and within 6 hours had analysed them. By 16.00 we had informed the GP Medical Centre who were then able to inform staff of the results enabling a number of staff to return to work as the tests proved negative.



Already this week we have delivered swabs to another GP Medical Centre and will bring on 2 more Medical Centres and hopefully 2 Hospices very shortly.

Whilst we know what we are doing is just a drop in a very large ocean we already know it is making a difference to those dealing with the reality of COVID-19 at the sharp end.