



14 April 2020

Covid-19 update

Dear

I hope this letter finds you well. Never has this statement felt so earnest, and less like a platitude.

Whilst we are trying to provide you with regular updates, this update feels all the more important given the current focus on care homes in the national press and on social media. The current narrative in the press is both unhelpful and also not reflective of our experience of managing the pandemic arrangements so far. Yes, it is true that our services are under strain, but our residents – your relatives – are safe and being well cared for. We are not struggling for resources and we are still accessing medical care and advice as we need it. Obviously, our usual routines have changed, and we are finding and adjusting to new ways of working, but the business of care still carries on.

Currently we are, possibly, a week away from the coronavirus peak and I know that you all, rightly, continue to be worried about your relatives. I would like to reassure you that we continue to take our responsibility to all those in our care very seriously.

Our teams have been unbelievably dedicated to keeping our homes safe. We have seen staffing levels reduced due to staff falling ill themselves and needing to self-isolate while they recover. We also have a number of staff working from home as they fall under the guidance for 'shielding' issued by the NHS and Public Health England (PHE). So far, we have been able to continue to deliver the care and treatment people need by diverting staff from other duties, such as answering telephones and managing activities in other parts of the business, to fill gaps. For example, I worked the Easter Weekend as a Registered Nurse in Durban House to support the staff there and so others could take time off to rest and recuperate. As you can imagine, these changes to our workforce have meant that the staff in the homes are exceptionally busy and so we may, at times, divert the phone lines to the staff who are working from home to ensure that staff in the homes are free to deliver care. I know this is a very difficult and worrying time for you all, but we will keep you as up to date with information as we are able.

Please send all post to: **Sears Healthcare Limited**

c/o Keith Willis Associates, Gothic House, Barker Gate, Nottingham NG1 1JU

As knowledge about coronavirus grows, there is more and more information being made available about how to identify, manage and support people with the virus. The public health and care home specific guidance has changed multiple times over the past few weeks, and this has enabled us to continue to develop and refine the plans we have in place to keep delivering care. I have included some of the key references at the end of this letter that provide more detailed information, if you are interested in reading further.

We have put in place a standard operating procedure to protect our residents and staff. This includes clear guidance on how to care for residents with suspected and confirmed Covid-19 infection. We are very clear on our infection control precautions to protect staff and residents. Care home staff are very well versed in infection control measures due to the experiences we have in managing the more commonly encountered seasonal influenza and gastroenteritis infection outbreaks. The approach we take now is very similar, but even more robust.

Our staff have the skills and equipment to check the vital signs of residents, including pulse oximetry. There is a procedure in place to escalate any concerns to external healthcare practitioners, who will help us to support residents according to need using well established clinical risk assessment tools.

As we develop more understanding of the virus, it has become clear that the signs of Covid-19 may be different in very frail people to the general population. We are using new and emerging national guidance on how to identify atypical symptoms and how to escalate our concerns to GPs or other primary healthcare professionals.

We are currently caring for all of our Residents in their rooms. Some Residents have found this easier to adjust to than others. We are working hard to make sure that we are constantly walking around the home talking with residents and trying to keep them connected to what is going on in the outside world. For residents whose dementia means that this information is hard to process or not appropriate we are using distraction and other behavioural techniques to occupy them and help keep them settled in their rooms.

We have reviewed advanced care plans with our GPs and will work with the GPs, paramedics and healthcare support staff to make decisions about treatment and care should a resident become unwell. If transfer to hospital is not thought to offer any benefit to a resident then other treatment options, such as palliative or conservative care will be provided. This is a conversation that we would have under normal circumstances, and there is no change in this approach. Where appropriate, residents will still be admitted to hospital.

We are continuing to accept admissions in line with NHS and PHE guidance as part of the national initiative to reduce demand on acute hospital beds. We are nursing all new admissions in isolation, in accordance with PHE guidelines, to minimise the risk of transmission of any illnesses. We are liaising closely with the GPs and our pharmacy provider to make sure that we have a good supply of medication to support all care and treatment options available to us.

As you will be aware, there have been ongoing issues with personal protective equipment (PPE), but we have had a good supply to both homes and continue to procure masks, aprons and visors as we can find them. There have been some issues around the guidance on PPE changing, but this has not affected our services and we continue to use the correct PPE for all staff. All staff have access to the PPE that they need.

Currently, whilst there has been some testing of residents, there has been no testing of staff. Reports are that testing is still not reliable, and it is also very difficult for social care to access. Therefore, we will continue to monitor all staff on admission to the building and advise all staff to self-isolate when they show symptoms or become otherwise unwell. We are working with all our staff to ensure that they are financially supported during any periods of absence.

Finally, I would like to say thank you for your patience and kind words of encouragement since this period of 'lockdown' began. It has been difficult for everyone, and I don't underestimate the emotional pressures that this has placed on us all. We will continue to find ways to keep in touch with you. We are currently exploring the feasibility of setting up a 'Zoom' video call, or similar, with you all to keep you updated on the more general aspects of how we are managing this ongoing situation. We will update you once we have some firmer details established.

In the meantime, stay safe, stay at home, and take care,

Richard Adams

Chief Executive Officer

References:

https://www.bgs.org.uk/sites/default/files/content/attachment/2020-03-25/BGS%20Managing%20the%20COVID-19%20pandemic%20in%20care%20homes_0.pdf

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