



The Beeches, Apex 12, Old Ipswich Road, Colchester, Essex, CO7 7QR  
Telephone: 01206 987440 • Fax: 01206 987441

**Thursday 27 August 2020**

Dear relatives and friends

### **CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) – Update**

I hope this communication finds you and your families well. As I look out of my office today it appears that summer has sadly abandoned us, and I am sure like myself, you find it almost incomprehensible that we are about to enter September. 2020 has certainly proved itself to be a year we will never forget, and yet one many of us working within the care sector would like to erase from our memories forever.

As you are aware, we commenced garden visits back in June, subject to local circumstances and risk assessment. Whilst less than ideal and not allowing for the usual informality with which you previously visited your loved ones, we took this decision to support the well-being of our residents and allow you to spend precious time with your relatives. It is evident that the introduction of garden visits in the majority of homes has proven extremely beneficial for all concerned and I am most grateful to you for working with us to ensure the visiting protocols are strictly adhered to. Sadly we have experienced a few challenges, and as much as I can totally understand your frustrations, I would respectfully ask that the protocols in place are adhered to since this allows us to do everything possible to protect those living and working in our homes.

We continued to wait for government guidance which was finally made available on 22 July 2020. In all honesty this simply validated the decisions we had already taken, and sadly remains ambiguous and places responsibility on the provider and local health protection teams to determine whether any form of visiting can take place.

At this time our position remains that visitors are not permitted inside our services, other than in some exceptional circumstances, as our priority is to ensure the health, safety, and wellbeing of our residents and staff. To date exceptional circumstances have been made to ensure that our residents are able to spend precious time with loved ones at the end of their lives. Every individual request has been reviewed by myself and our Director of Clinical Governance, working with the home managers, our operational team and the local health protection teams.

I know only too well that we cannot always provide positive responses to your requests, but you have my assurance that we review every single case with compassion and sadly practicality, determined by the circumstances in a home at any given time. Please do continue to communicate with the home managers and indeed use our support email, or contact me directly – I will do my very best to respond to all emails within a short a period as possible.

I am acutely aware of our residents who due to a high level of physical dependency or living on the upper floors of our homes and unable to be transferred in to chairs, have not received garden or window visits and have therefore not seen loved ones in person since mid-March. During the last few weeks we have tried to determine how many residents and relatives are impacted in this way, and I have asked our managers to consider how we can facilitate some level of visiting from loved ones. Therefore over the next two weeks we will be putting plans in place to allow exceptional indoor visits, which must be in line with government guidance, and are subject to sign off by health protection teams.

**A member of the Healthcare Homes Group**

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In the current climate we will only be facilitating indoor visits if garden or window visits are absolutely not possible, and we will have robust protocols in place which must be adhered to. If you are a relative where this is applicable, we will communicate with you directly not later than Wednesday 16th September and provide further details of the same. I would ask for your support in allowing us the time to communicate with you directly, and must stress that if your case is considered exceptional then the visitor must remain the same individual each week, subject to screening and again will be time restricted. I do hope this will provide some reassurance and comfort to those of you who have not been able to see your loved ones for many months. As much as I know this is not the response many of you may have wished for, this allows us to limit the risk of virus transmission and the overall number of visitors in to the homes and also work within the guidance available.

Please be assured that we have already considered the changing weather and many of you will have seen our outside visiting spaces which are fully equipped with heating, light and power whilst being connected to our fire and nurse call systems. This will be safe area to visit your loved ones with perspex screens, individual entrances and an intercom system installed. It is our plan that all homes will be provided with this safe visiting space, albeit we have a handful of homes where we are needing to be more creative due to outdoor space. To date 12 structures have been completed with a minimum of 2 each week being successfully commissioned.

I would ask that you kindly remember our need to be guided by the local health protection teams and in the event of an outbreak (sadly the definition of an outbreak is not a nationally used term) or evidence of the home being in an area where a local spike has occurred, we will need to rapidly suspend visiting to protect our vulnerable residents.

I am sure that you will have seen the Flu Vaccination information programme and the need to ensure that as many vulnerable adults as possible, as well as staff teams are vaccinated. I would ask for your consent where applicable, in order that we do everything possible to avoid the 'perfect storm' of winter Flu and Covid-19.

We have received a number of queries regarding the testing programmes which you will have doubtless seen mentioned in the media. Regrettably, despite the government promise that all care home residents and staff would have access to regular testing, we continue to face challenges and have witnessed regional variations in the scale and efficiency of testing. The test provides us with a 'moment in time' result for staff or residents, and yes is not perfect but remains an essential tool in allowing us to protect everyone living or working in our services. We will continue to lobby for improvement in access and escalate concerns where test kits are not being received – this again can affect our ability to allow ingoing visits to our homes.

I would finally like to say a very heartfelt thank you to you and obviously our staff teams who have worked tirelessly over the past months. Our recent Appreciation Week was an extremely well-received initiative, but we will never be able to say thank you adequately to those who have show commitment, passion and utter dedication to our wonderful residents. We are most appreciative of the cards, gifts, messages of support and reviews you have supplied for our teams who continue to 'battle on' no matter how tough the times may be.

My kindest regards



Helen Gidlow  
Chief Operating Officer

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