

Wessex Care Christmas and COVID-19 Briefing 14 (09/12/20)

As we approach the festive season there have been significant developments for us all at Wessex Care and this briefing is intended to provide information and guidance to all residents, visitors and employees as to our position over this period and into next year.

Firstly, a huge thank you and well done to all the staff that were involved in the successful moves of the Intensive Rehabilitation service and their current patients to the brand-new Little Manor Care Centre and then subsequently the moving of all residents and staff at Castle View Nursing Home, as one family, to their new home in the state-of-the-art Care Centre at Kimberly East. There will be a settling in period but we know families have already enjoyed the indoor visiting pod available at Kimberly East which was not available for residents and families at Castle View.

COVID-19 infection in Care Homes Wiltshire

Wiltshire Care homes have continued to perform well but as the infection rate has increased in the community so has the risk from the community with increased infection finding its way into care settings. That is why it is so important that we all take responsibility for reducing the virus onward transfer in the community by following the national guidance on Infection Prevention and Control. As a result, there have been a small number of isolated but significant outbreaks in the north of the County. Local Public Health have been absolutely clear that their investigation and monitoring of these events shows that the homes had done everything in their power to prevent and control but as a Public Health expert said to us recently, 'this bug really likes humans'!

We are very pleased to inform you that to date all our hundreds of tests with staff and residents have returned negative which is an absolute testament to the commitment of our staff to high standards of cleanliness, IPC and PPE standards as well as their individual caution in their personal lives. Well done each and every one of you; you are all stars.

Therefore, now is not the time to become complacent or to change our strict position and to this end we have attached the latest Position Statement on Care Home Visiting across B&NES, Swindon and Wiltshire dated 04/12/2020. You will note the clear expectation on maintaining social distancing.

We have been informed that all residential units with over 50 residents will see the delivery of the new Rapid Lateral Flow Testing kits with the intent of increasing staff testing to twice per week and resident testing to weekly, smaller residential units will follow. This test was heralded as being able to be available not only for staff and residents but also for family visitors with the national stated aim of this providing some panacea for the relaxation of visiting rules. We write to inform you this is simple not the case and that is why the 'Position Statement regarding Care Home Visiting' attached is quite clear that we are to maintain our current position.

Having reviewed the new information provided by the manufacturers, which we have attached for your information, we remain very concerned about its effectiveness. Indeed, several Council DPH, mainly in the north of England have advised Care Homes not to use it.

In the section titled; Limitations of the Procedures it stated:

- 1) '1) Clinical performance was evaluated with frozen samples, and test performance may be different with fresh samples.' [So, they don't know how it performs on fresh sample]
- 2) '14) The performance of this test has not been evaluated for use in patients without signs and symptoms of respiratory infection and performance may differ in asymptomatic individuals.' [So, they don't know how it performs with people who are asymptomatic which is what the government guidance is recommending its use for and is the fundamental point of testing visitors at the door for immediate visit pending result].

These are just two areas of science which would make us concerned about the validity of this test until it has been properly tested on fresh samples and on a broader study which would include asymptomatic people. The studies coming out from the north of England regions don't look positive on this score, some are identifying a 50% accuracy level. Therefore, from a risk assessment and mitigation review perspective we would introduce this only as an additional testing method to complement the current Care Home visiting restrictions and not advocate any relaxation at this time. This is not a test that makes in room or direct contact even with correct IPC and PPE sufficiently safe in our opinion to warrant change, (exception as normal would-be palliative care). Therefore, we will implement testing for visitors as an additional protection for our residents as and when we receive the tests and the resources to implement. We will discuss resourcing pressures separately below.

However, having looked at the new guidance, considered the latest local PH advice and guidance and having reviewed our risk assessment we will not be changing any visiting arrangements at this time except we have concluded that we can increase the number of identified consistent visitor from one to two. They can come either together or separately but all other rules still apply and the new consistent visitor must sign off on all the requirements before this commences.

Please note for our Community staff, we have always included them in our residential staff testing process so they have also been tested every seven days however the government has announced a rollout of testing programme specific to all domiciliary care staff and there will be a slight change of process for the testing of all our community care team.

Today we heard the great news about the first vaccination using the Pfizer vaccine and we want to give you the latest information we have on this.

You may have seen some mixed messages regarding the priority or not for care home residents and staff which has changed from having top priority to not and then back to where we are today which is top priority again. The reality is as follows;

The Pfizer vaccine is delicate and does not like having more than four transitions, it takes two transitions to get it to the UK key distribution sites. It needs to be kept under -70° , requires mixing prior to being ready for inoculation and does not like being knocked. All of which affects how and where it can be provided to the vaccination recipient.

Roll out in Wiltshire we understand (subject to change) will start, phase 1, at the Great Western Hospital in Swindon and be provided to Care Homes with over 50 residents within a 20-mile radius of the hospital. Staff will need to travel to the hospital as the delicacy, as described above, precludes it moving currently to the multiple care home settings. Phase 2 will bring the vaccine to other Hospital

including Bath and Salisbury followed by several more sites in Phase 3. It is to be provided to care homes with over 50 residents initially as they have been identified as higher risk services than smaller homes. For us this means that Kimberly West & East staff will probably be offered this first as although they are separate Care Centres they are registered as one with CQC. Time scales seem to suggest vaccination availability, locally, just before Christmas. Please note the Pfizer vaccines and the Oxford both require the recipient to have two inoculations with a circa 20-day period between before they then begin to develop levels of immunity.

Please note that this vaccine and we understand the next vaccines have not been tested for use during pregnancy so no one should agree to vaccination if they consider they maybe or are pregnant.

It appears therefore likely that resident's vaccination will commence when the Oxford vaccine is available, as it is a more robust vaccine, which we are informed could be approved for use within the next 2 to 4 weeks. However, there may be provision for some residents who are able independently or with support to attend the vaccination sites to do so. We have also attached for your reading the government information we received yesterday on vaccination which we hope provides some clarity on any concerns you have as a member of staff, resident or family member on agreeing to be vaccinated or agreeing on behalf of your loved one. We would strongly recommend everyone who is able to be vaccinated is vaccinated at the earliest opportunity as the quicker we can get significant percentages of residents and staff vaccinated the quicker we / you will be adding a significant layer of protection to our most vulnerable residents, to yourselves and your families, and we can start to make some significant developments on the visiting front.

We would again caution that even with vaccination it will be sometime before there is evidence about its effect on transfer as different vaccines provide different types of protection and although you may be vaccinated and protected it will not always mean that you cannot catch it and continue to spread it so we have to remain vigilant and cautious and we do not expect to see any changes in visitors and staff current PPE requirements for many months. However, on a more positive note it should allow us to consider in room visits, longer visiting periods potentially with a greater range of people and a relaxation of the direct monitoring we currently have. Please do remember it is not in our service or individual nature to restrict visiting as we have been required to do. Our services are designed to be open, engaging and welcoming so please do be mindful of this when you are communicating with our staff, its not their fault we are where we are and they have dedicated the last 10 months to doing everything in their power to protect all our residents and community care customers while still ensuring they received a 24/7 service. They did not have the option to hold up at home or with family but instead came to work every day, many doing extensively more hours, some living away from their own children for months at a time to ensure our residents and community customers stayed safe. Please please be kind to them.

Importantly we wanted to be open and discuss the resourcing of what amounts to a significant and sustained requirement for staffing resources to provide:

- Testing of all staff on a twice weekly basis
- Testing of all residents on a weekly basis
- Testing of all family and friends designated visitors on each visit

- Testing of all other visitors professional, maintenance and otherwise.
- Releasing staff on two separate occasions to be inoculated

All providers are currently in discussion nationally and locally as to how this is to be achieved as we simply don't have the staff resource to provide this at present and even if funding is agreed we will have to significantly recruit and train new employees in these roles. We will do our best but we will not dilute our primary care and welfare responsibilities to provide what is essential a national Public Health programme.

We hope that being clear and direct about the information at our disposal and the challenges we face with the decisions we have come to, if not agreed with, are at least understood and informed. We understand the frustration the visiting situation can understandably cause and we will do everything in our power to make this Christmas as best as possible while protecting the highly vulnerable people it is our privilege to care for.

What's happening during the festive session

With regards to visits and calls, so far through December we have booked the following...

100+ visits, 48 zoom calls, 18 skype calls, 7 facetime calls and Malcolm will be arranging visits where possible on the key days of Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and the other Bank Holidays. Please be aware that to achieve this staff have volunteered to forgo their time with family and friends. Many of our staff have not been able to take their full complement of leave this year and yet they are still committed to ensuring the limited visiting we can provide is maintained on these special days. We will not be able to support this for all but will do our best as always; a degree of priority will be given to residents who rarely see their relatives due to distance and frailty.

Festive activities within all services this year will include (not an exhaustive list), Live music via Zoom with Dave Dawson, Christmas themed online activity sessions with Craig from Engaging Activities. A special 'Alive' Christmas session on the 18th. Christmas Carols in the car park at Little Manor on the 21st. An online Christmas music special for all homes with the Lone Reveller (aka Nigel Revill) on the 23rd. December also sees the return of Father David Fisher who will be visiting the homes to offer Holy Communion and will no doubt share the Christmas Message.

We have also ordered DVD copies of a special Christmas music and magic show created by 'Magic Moments' which should be arriving any day and which the residents can watch as often as they wish and the ever-popular Mike Sidaway has given us the link to his own pre-recorded Christmas Special.

Along with, in addition, everything the Welfare team has planned, it does feel like we're going to make it as festive a Christmas as we possibly can...

As always and as part of the Wessex Care family we are here to support you all; residents, families, friends and our fantastic employees throughout this special and challenging festive period. Let's focus on the amazing news that the vaccine is coming and, with sufficient quantity, it will be a game changer.

Merry Christmas and a better New Year to you all

Matthew, Pauline, Jodie & Christian