

# Covid-19: Voices from the care home frontline: 11<sup>th</sup> April 2020

A digest of issues and challenges as well as stories of courage, innovation and commitment from care homes as gathered by 'My Home Life England' during the weeks of 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

## Top Issues from My Home Life

67 contacts (35 emails and 31 phone calls and 1 through Facebook) to managers that are part of the My Home Life England movement.

### General

In the main what we're hearing is the horror of care home residents and staff getting sick and dying and how extraordinarily hard and complex the role of the manager is right now. Staying on top of the latest information and guidance, answering staff concerns, dealing with absence, anxieties, residents' concerns, keeping families updated – all this, whilst also keeping upbeat. The stories in the press over the last few weeks about lack of food, lack of PPE and proper clinical support are reflected in what we are hearing. Some are feeling supported by colleagues in the health system but some feel very isolated and scared.

"I'm as frightened and confused as everyone else but I have to walk out of my office with a smile on my face, a positive attitude and look like I know what I'm doing!"

"I am worried about having no choice but having to work and putting myself and my children at risk but am grateful I can contribute on the front line."

"My main focus is to keep my staff upbeat, they are very vulnerable."

### Feeling isolated

"My biggest fear is that staff illness and resident illness are likely to occur at the same time and the thought that one day I may not have enough carers to give someone the love they deserve when they are poorly makes me very sad."

Despite this, the focus for both managers and staff is on the residents' wellbeing:

1. A care home in Lancashire has set up a virtual game via Zoom and played darts with a care home down in Devon.
2. Some homes are getting residents to create artwork and they are sticking these to the windows so relatives can see when they visit and stand the outside
3. Care home in Kent have set up Zoom and six residents living with dementia were able to attend the usual Sunday church service for the sermon, hymns – was lovely.
4. Care home advertised for paid "wellbeing assistant" roles to support care team – they sit and chat to residents and ensure they are entertained. Don't do care work but do a bit of cleaning and bed making

## **Social distancing**

Residents who have dementia or mental health issues can forget social distancing measures, or they take it personally when staff won't come near them and are offended. This led to a resident refusing to take his medication

Staff needing to offer even more reassurance and more 1-to-1 support

## **Challenge – staff morale**

The sheer exhaustion, anxiety, short-staffing and new practices are making it terribly difficult for staff, who somehow are keeping their spirits up, but when might the adrenaline drop? Managers and deputies felt bombarded with information. “overwhelming’

- Manager wearing nurse uniform to show staff that she can help and that they are equal. Managers don't just sit in the office in front of a computer “I'm being a manager I'm on the floor, chatting to keep moral high and to give support”.
- Manager is holding a mindfulness session for staff
- Fellow managers are supporting each other through My Home Life WhatsApp groups (Essex and Liverpool)

## **Challenge – relatives feeling worried**

- Solution - Activities coordinator in North West London made high number of calls to residents' families in a day. She was exhausted but they really appreciated it

## **Challenge – lack of PPE**

- Through My Home Life Whatsapp groups, some managers are sharing PPE

## **Challenge – GP visits**

- Mixed insights, with some managers stating that GPs are nervous to visit as they fear they could be asymptomatic, but also some positive feedback on the speed in which GP's are responding to care homes when doing Skype consultations

## **General**

A real sense that, whilst it is a dreadful time, care homes aren't strangers to crises - they are very creative in responding, and there is a real sense that some staff are stepping up, to the point where they are even saying goodbye to their family and moving into the care home to help.

“My magnificent team of staff working their socks off.”

“We've shown as a team we can truly pull together when needed, it has made communication stronger... we are in this together and we are sticking together. I feel very, very close to my colleagues, residents and relatives.”

- In one care home, they have noticed that where residents sit on the lounge is very important, and also what is on the TV as covid-19 news make for a depressing atmosphere. Even if residents have advanced dementia they'll still pick up on atmosphere. So, the manager chooses nature programmes, so the atmosphere is more positive
- Another care home has been putting rainbows on residents' doors to indicate if there are isolating. (Dignity)

## Positives or motivational stories

### **Final positive story – sharing leftover food with care homes**

A story from Bedford, that focuses on community kindness. We've heard that a local charity has been collecting surplus food from supermarkets, that would otherwise have gone to waste. This includes fruit, vegetables and other foods about to expire. Instead of being thrown away, these foods were distributed and delivered to care homes across the local Bedfordshire area. This meant that homes were able to have fresh products, including some that they wouldn't normally have, and staff were also able to take fresh produce home to their families and were very grateful. This has "brought a lot of happiness to some of the care homes across Bedfordshire" and is a lovely example of the community seeing and cherishing care homes, as well as working together with the local supermarket to minimise food waste.

### **Final quote:**

"When this is all over, I hope we finally receive the recognition we deserve as SKILLED workers and a pay rise would be really, really nice. I can but hope..."

### **What MHL are doing?**

My Home Life across the UK have supported over 1800 care home managers over the past 8 years. We keep a connection with many of them to better understand what is happening at the frontline and to share good practice with them.

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