

PE1841/E

Petitioner submission of 1 February 2021

Guidance was issued 12th October 2020 which allowed for up to 4 hours of visiting with touch. Initially, we thought that this was a reasonable compromise however the reality is that very few relatives are getting any meaningful visits indoors.

The Government has provided care homes with PPE, lateral flow testing, funds for care home staff to self-isolate, funds to purchase iPads and funds to allow extra staff to be recruited to facilitate visits and yet we are only seeing a handful of care homes follow the guidelines from October. From our survey results, we see that the few care homes that are following the guidelines tend to be charity run or are not for profit organisations.

It is evident from the experiences from the members of Care Home Relatives Scotland (CHRS) that the majority of people in care are not having any kind of meaningful interaction between residents and their loved ones. Every time progress is made with residents and families benefiting, another obstacle appears. Members of CHRS have been refused contact because the care homes can't—

- follow guidance because our company has its own rules,
- allow visits with touch,
- facilitate video calls,
- have Christmas decorations,
- allow you access to your relative's room,
- trust you to use PPE.
- get through to public health,
- allow indoor visits because public health haven't approved them,
- accept Christmas presents,
- have hairdressers,
- alternate visitors,
- give you an extra visit even though visits are going unused,
- let visitors push a wheelchair,
- facilitate outside visits as we haven't bought any heaters for winter,
- give you an essential visit as we'd have to give everyone them,
- let you see your dying relative for more than 15 minutes a day,

Many members of CHRS have been told

- We don't trust test results,
- Public health say no,

Sadly the default is to dress relatives in PPE and sit them behind a screen 2 metres away from your hard of hearing, non-verbal relative. We have been given no exit plan to resume meaningful family contact.

Even with the introduction of testing and vaccines, we are hearing from care companies that there still won't be any changes to visiting which begs the question, what will it take?

Care home residents have never had the freedom that the general public have but yet they are the first to suffer because of the freedom the general public has been granted whilst at the same time being denied face to face medical assessments from GPs & wider multidisciplinary teams.

We have heard from many organisation and groups about what can and can't be done, what the guidelines say or don't say, who can make decisions and who doesn't have to follow these but yet nearly 11 months on, no one has ever asked what is important to the residents. Over 35,000 citizens of this country have had their voice and rights stripped away. If this was children or animals there would be a national outcry.

For example,

- Non-cohabiting couples across the country can visit each other, not applicable if you live in a care home.
- People living alone are allowed to create bubbles for their mental health, not applicable if you live in a care home.
- The general public are encouraged to get outside and connect with others for their mental health, not applicable if you live in a care home. Many have spent days, weeks and months alone in their room.
- Provisions are in place to allow access to someone's home to provide care, not applicable if you live in a care home. The love and care that families offer, which differs from what staff offer has been deemed irrelevant.
- Christmas bubbles were allowed for one day, not applicable for those living in a care home. They were lucky to see one person for 30 minutes.

We hear constantly restrictions are in place to protect residents yet residents are dying daily of non-covid related reasons and at times still being kept from families, sometimes until their last few hours. How is this fair or humane? The emotional distress this is leaving on the families left behind is unimaginable, does our mental health not matter?

No-one should be living out their final days alone in a place that they call home.

Once again, we would like to finish by reiterating that if guidance was working then this petition would never have been needed. We cannot emphasise enough the pain that is being caused throughout the country for residents that have been isolated the past 11 months and the families watching them suffer.

We have the power to make this change for residents living today, and it can be done safely, but also for future residents to know they will never be isolated from families for what could become years.