

PE1841/QQ

Kristin Duncan submission of 15 March 2021

I support this petition from Natasha Hamilton for the following reason:

It is fundamentally important that legislation is passed immediately to ensure that for anyone (of any age) living in residential care, the most basic of their human rights, to see one essential care-giving relative or friend, is enshrined in law in Scotland.

Much has been written by other petitioners on this urgent matter of infringement of basic human rights and I would ask the Scottish Parliament to consider the following facts:

Between March 2020 and 12 March 2021, more than 15,000 people have died in care homes. COVID-19 has been a factor in only one fifth of these deaths.

All of these people have died, cut-off from the people who mean most to them. For many relatives, permission to say goodbye to a loved one, often unconscious, was literally hours before they passed away.

The most important person in the life of a vulnerable adult in a care home be it husband, wife, parent, child or friend has a fundamental role to play in supporting the health and well-being of that individual through love and companionship.

There are countless reports from distraught relatives of the rapid decline they have witnessed in their loved one's well-being through twelve months of separation and isolation from family. Some elderly residents too have been able to articulate their feelings of deep despair at being literally 'locked away' from their family and literally 'giving up' the will to live.

The impact this isolation and separation has had on elderly care home residents can be measured by clinicians in terms of rapid decline in well-being and deteriorating cognitive skills, and organisations like Alzheimer Scotland have frequently reported on the impacts. The impact of the separation on relatives is however unquantifiable and will likely go unrecorded. The grief and despair of families being unable to provide meaningful contact in the last few months of their loved one's life is profound and may have lasting effects beyond what is normally experienced when someone passes away late in life.

It was understandable at the start of the pandemic a year ago to literally close care homes to all visitors, but there is now so much more knowledge on good infection control and mitigation measures. As the pandemic continues, reducing footfall may well be essential, but with the right PPE and testing (and now the roll-out of a vaccine) it should be possible to secure the right to see one essential care-giving relative or friend. With this, more people in care will survive through the pandemic.

There have been two or three significant and well publicised communications from Scottish Government on 'revised guidance' for care homes over the past year; in August, October and now the latest in February. It cannot be stressed enough that care home providers pay little or no heed to what is in effect 'only' guidance. Since

last August, in spite of revised guidance, very few care homes have allowed meaningful contact for elderly residents and their loved one, with indoor visits (if they are allowed at all) restricted to an 'interview' style room with no physical contact through touch, for half an hour once a week. This does not provide the conduit for love and companionship that elderly residents so clearly need to thrive and to survive.

As a matter of urgency, data needs to be collected by the Government and its Inspectorate on the quality of indoor visiting and not leave this to a matter of the care home 'ticking the box' to say they are allowing indoor visits. The vast majority of care home residents in Scotland are currently still not receiving meaningful and life-sustaining support and comfort from a loved one. This is having a profound impact on their well-being and rapidly precipitating their demise and ultimate death.

Given that Government guidance to care home providers clearly cannot be enforced, urgent action is needed now to enshrine in law the right for care home residents to receive one essential care-giving friend or relative.

I would therefore request that this petition is included in the legacy document to the next Parliament when action should be taken as a matter of priority to secure this minimum of rights of vulnerable people in care homes.