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Dear Residents, Family and Friends

I hope that this communication finds you all safe and well during this difficult time. Following the increased media attention around the spread of COVID – 19 in Nursing Homes, several of you have been in contact to ask what we have in place in Beechlaw. I want to take this opportunity to outline the measures that have been put in place to prevent the spread of the virus to our Residents.

Management and Clinical Governance

In ordinary times Managers meet each morning to discuss the current situation in the Nursing Home. During COVID-19 this meeting has now become the Emergency Management Team meeting, who are responsible for the planning and response to potential cases of COVID-19.

These meetings are now being held either by video call or conference call and I, as COVID – 19 Co-Ordinator join these meetings each morning ensuring that any response is in line with the HSE guidelines and to ensure that all actions are implemented. These meeting are where we discuss strategy for the management of anyone showing symptoms whether they are a resident or staff, then implement the necessary procedures as per the HSE guidelines.

Staffing

Our staff remain as dedicated as ever to the care of the residents. Some staff have had to isolate for different reasons however no staff member has currently tested positive for COVID – 19. These absences have resulted in there being the occasional shift where we have not had full staffing.

Staff are currently in a phase of “Active Monitoring” for signs and symptoms of the virus. Temperatures are monitored twice in a shift and any concerns actioned immediately. Staff also continue “Passive Monitoring” of their own health and report to the DON immediately if they develop symptoms.

We have made the decision at this stage not to replace staff with agency workers but to alter our routines to ensure that the residents continue to receive a high standard of care. We have taken this decision as we feel, there is an increased risk of virus spread, having agency workers coming to the home who may have worked in multiple sites and we have no way of monitoring what exposure they have had.

If more staff needed to self-isolate and there was a concern that the staffing was not at a safe level then we would review this situation, however we continue to recruit staff and have employed additional staff over and above our normal numbers in an effort to ensure that we have adequate staffing at any one time.

Infection precaution and Control

We have a very detailed Infection Prevention and Control Policy in Beechlawm which has been updated to reflect the current situation of this Global Pandemic. As with all updated policies this has been issued to staff to read and refer to when necessary. We are also collaborating with Nursing Matters & Associates and are implementing their "COVID-19 Policy and Emergency Plan for Residential Settings".

Residents who are found to be symptomatic are isolated in their own room for a period of 14 days or longer if symptoms persist. Residents in shared rooms are moved to single rooms to ensure effective isolation. Residents are referred to the National Ambulance Service who come on site and swab anyone displaying symptoms. At the time of writing this no resident has yet tested positive for COVID-19.

Staff are adhering to best practice by not wearing their uniforms to and from work and laundering uniforms daily.

Daily cleaning has been increased to include more frequently used areas and high-risk items such as door handles, keypads etc. If a resident test positive, a specialist cleaning team from Derrycourt will attend site to clean those areas.

PPE

You will have seen in the media Nursing Homes have expressed concerns about the availability of PPE. [REDACTED] liaises on a daily basis with our Link Infection Control Nurse in the HSE and places an order to replace PPE that was used in the previous 24 hours. We currently have a stock of PPE to meet the needs of our current situation and a supply of additional PPE should we have an outbreak.

We have also purchased additional PPE, alcohol gel, and cleaning supplies from our suppliers to ensure that we have adequate stock to meet any situation that immediately arises.

We are monitoring stock very closely, update the inventory daily and ordering daily to replenish stock.

Training

As we are not able to have trainers into the Nursing Home at this time the staff are currently undergoing a series of online refresher training and additional training related to COVID-19. This is available through the HSE and has been made specific to Residential settings.

For the Managers there are weekly webinars relating to the Management of COVID-19 run by both the HSE and Nursing Homes Ireland.

A training company in collaboration with Nursing Homes Ireland have made available to all Nursing Homes an online induction training package for all new staff. This will ensure that they are equipped with all the training they require from the day they start employment.

Social distancing

In order to have effective social distancing, we have introduced 2 sittings for all meals. This means that the number of residents and staff in the dining rooms at any one time has been halved.

Mass is now lived streamed twice a day to reduce the number of people in the chapel.

Activities have been re-arranged and are now ongoing in 4 different areas of the Nursing Home to reduce the numbers in rooms.

Staff are socially distancing whenever possible; breaks have been staggered to reduce the number of people in the staff room.

Daily contact with the HSE

We have been allocated a dedicated Infection Prevention and Control Nurse specialist from the HSE. She is available via email, landline and mobile phone for advice.

In addition to this we receive daily briefings from the HSE via email with the latest guidelines as the changing pattern of the disease spread evolves. We are currently receiving copies of any information that is issued to the hospitals. This information is discussed with the Managers at the morning meeting or if more urgent, is discussed between [REDACTED] and myself as necessary.

HIQA

HIQA continue to support us during this time. We are in weekly contact with our inspector and receive weekly briefings from the Chief Inspector. The Department of Health has requested that HIQA conduct risk assessment in Nursing Homes where there are outbreaks, and we will fully engage in this process if and when we have positive cases confirmed.

Nursing Homes Ireland

As members of Nursing Home Ireland, we are benefiting from their lobbying the Government to gain equal access to the same standard of support, staffing and clinical equipment as the HSE. Daily we receive briefings by email with the latest updates which includes information on the management of outbreaks.

Due to the unknown nature of this Virus, It is not possible for us to say with any degree of certainty that Beechlawn will remain COVID -19 free going forward, but we can assure you that we have put a very comprehensive preparedness plan in place and will continue to take every step to keep our residents safe. We have a proven track record in relation to Infection Prevention and Control in Beechlawn and have

only had one small outbreak of influenza in the last 10 years, which we hope will offer some small re-assurance in this worrying time.

We understand that this is a very difficult time for everyone given the unrepresented times that we find ourselves in. It is even more difficult when you are unable to visit your loved one in person, while the video calls, newsletters and texts may help in some way we know it is not a replacement for a hug and a face to face chat.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you want to discuss the matter further.

Yours sincerely

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CEO