

8th April 2020

Dear family member,

I am writing to you as the country nears the end of its third week on lock-down. These are truly extraordinary, worrying and challenging times, but our commitment to keeping your loved one safe and well is unwavering, as is my personal commitment to keep family members informed and involved at this difficult time. This is why I am writing to you again now, and will continue writing to you regularly until we're out the other side of this pandemic.

I would like to take this opportunity to update you on a number of issues, all of which have been raised with our dedicated team of family consultants on our helpline for families. The number for that, in case you aren't aware, is 0300 303 9161 and the team are available to take your calls Monday to Friday between 10am and 2pm.

The first thing to mention is personal protective equipment (PPE), the supply of which I would say is our top priority at the moment and certainly one of the main concerns being raised by colleagues. You have probably seen in the news that it is very difficult at the present time to get hold of supplies of PPE like gloves, face masks and visors. However, we are working hard with others to make sure we have this equipment available, exploring every avenue open to us and raising the shortage at the highest levels of government. We are determined your loved ones and our colleagues will be kept as safe as possible, and we are leaving no stone unturned in our attempts to source as much PPE as we need.

Another priority for us has been the recruitment of more frontline support staff to make sure that we can cover any shortages at this time. We are working hard to make the recruitment process as streamlined as possible in order to get new colleagues where they need to be quickly, although unfortunately this means that we have had to make compromises in that we are not involving families and the people we support in the way we did before the pandemic and will do again once this period is behind us. This has been a tough call given our commitment to this and the progress we've made, but it's been a pragmatic one given the circumstances. Our priority is making sure that your loved ones are supported safely during this challenging time.

We are very keen to recognise our front line support colleagues for the amazing job they are doing, and to make sure that they have all the latest information and guidance to work as effectively and safely as possible, while also looking after themselves. We have also been creating and sharing a wide variety of easy read materials so that our colleagues can explain what is happening in a way that works for the people they are supporting. While people are not able to do what they usually do during the day and are having to stay at home, our Involvement team has put together some really great resources and activities to help keep people busy and engaged.

PTO

Get more from life

I really do appreciate that it must be very hard for you if you are not able to see your loved one at this time. We are trying to make sure every service has a tablet or laptop that can be used so that people can maintain contact with their family and friends. We know this is very important and we have heard some great stories about how people have shared virtual lunches or group sing songs and watched favourite TV shows together.

We are aware that some people we support may have to be admitted to hospital during this period if they develop symptoms of Covid-19, and we have been preparing for this by working closely with NHS England and Learning Disability England to produce some accessible resources for people we support to take with them (including a new 'hospital passport' specifically relating to Covid-19) so that hospital staff also have all the information they need. We have also prepared a factsheet for families on what happens when someone is admitted to hospital for this reason – you can read it on our website by visiting the special page to support families during this time: www.dimensions-uk.org/families/coronavirus/ If you would prefer to receive any documents on this page in a printed format, please feel free to contact the helpline for families.

You may have seen in the media that some people are worried about whether people with learning disabilities will get the care they need if they go into hospital. I would like to reassure you on this front too. On 2nd April the NHS clarified that "treatment decisions should not be made on the basis of the presence of learning disability and / or autism alone". Then, on 7th April, Ruth May, Chief Nursing Officer for England, and Professor Stephen Powis, National Medical Director for NHS England, issued a joint open letter in which they stated, "The key principle is that each person is an individual whose needs and preferences must be taken account of individually. By contrast blanket policies are inappropriate whether due to medical condition, disability, or age. This is particularly important in regard to 'do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation' (DNACPR) orders, which should only ever be made on an individual basis and in consultation with the individual or their family." We are making sure our managers know about this and share it with their teams, so that if someone has to go into hospital, we can make sure that hospital clinicians are keeping to the guidelines.

Finally, I would like to address head-on one concern that has been expressed to our family consultants by families who have taken their loved ones to stay with them to minimise risk during this time. Please rest assured that if this applies to you, your loved one's place will remain open so that they can return when the time is right.

Please take care, and don't hesitate to contact your locality manager, the helpline for families or me directly if you need to. We will get through this time together.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Scown
Chief Executive
Dimensions Group (including Discovery)

Get more from life