

22nd May 2020

Dear family member,

It's been nearly two months since the government announced the 'lock-down' which has meant that it is at least that long since many of you will have been able to see your relative we are supporting. The last two months have been a really difficult time for us all, but I would like to reassure you that we are doing all we can to provide good support and keep everyone as safe as we can.

Over the last fortnight the government has made two significant changes which have impacted upon the Dimensions group (including Discovery) and I would like to update you on these. The first was a change to the government guidance on the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The latest guidance stipulated that all social care workers should wear a face mask all the time they are within two metres of someone they are supporting, and use gloves and aprons if providing personal care. As we have always followed government guidance on all matters, there was no alternative to do so with this and so we implemented the change immediately.

Now, I recognise very well that this change has been difficult for many people we support to accept or understand. We have issued easy read guidance to support teams to help them explain the change, as well as top tips to help them overcome the extra barrier to communication caused by face masks. We have followed a risk assessment approach which has meant that in very exceptional cases when a person we support cannot accept face masks, they can be dispensed with to avoid far greater risk. However, in most cases, face masks are now the order of the day. We are continuing to keep this situation under regular review, and will introduce further flexibility as soon as we can. As I'm sure you will appreciate, the safety of the people we support and our colleagues is our top priority and we will not compromise on this, whatever the financial cost.

The second change I would like to mention is the slight easing of lock-down rules in England and I know that this has meant that some family members have been able to meet up with their relative in a public open space. This has been most welcome, but of course maintaining a distance of two metres is not easy or even possible for some people we support.

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We have been asked if it is possible for family members instead to meet a loved one in the person's garden, or if there is any way in which a person we support can see more than one family member at a time. At every stage, as I said, we have adhered to the latest government guidance and I'm really sorry to say that this must continue, even if it does rule out garden visits.

We are clearly past the peak of infections and I'm sure, like me, you're hoping we don't see a second wave and the re-imposition of the restrictions. Our thoughts are now turning to how we plan our way out of the social distancing restrictions and plot a course back to some kind of normality. In the meantime, I have been proud – although not surprised – to see how our brilliant support teams are working creatively and innovatively to keep the people we support busy, engaged and content while making sure that they and their families have every opportunity to keep in touch through technology. I hope you have been able to keep in regular contact with your loved one, but if you have any concerns about this, then please do speak to your loved one's locality manager. As I've said before, involving you in the support your loved one receives is more important now than ever.

Finally, I would like to remind you of our dedicated helpline for families (0300 303 9161) where our team of family consultants are available to take your calls Monday to Friday between 10am and 2pm. You can also contact them by email on family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org. If you have a particular concern about the day-to-day support your loved one is receiving, then please contact your locality manager directly.

These are difficult times which are taking their toll in different ways on all of us, but enforced separation from a loved one for an undefined period of time can be very frustrating and upsetting. Please rest assured that we are well placed and very focused on keeping everyone in our care safe during this crisis. Our staffing levels are very positive, our use of agency staff is well down on normal and, at the time of writing, only three people we support across the whole country are showing possible symptoms of Covid-19 – that is out of around 3,500 people we support in total. This does not make us complacent, far from it. But it does show that the support we are providing is sector-leading and you can feel confident that your loved one is safe with us.

Regards,



Steve Scown
Chief Executive
Dimensions Group (including Discovery)

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