

30th April 2021

You can read a summary of this letter in bullet points on page 3.

Dear family member,

Over the long course of this pandemic, I have written to you in some very challenging times as cases were rising and visits to see your loved ones had to be curtailed. We have all been living through unprecedented times, and I know very well that these have been marked by a lot of sadness and frustration as families have been unable to meet together. While we have been able for many families to use technology to keep people in touch virtually, we know that's not the same as meeting in person.

However, I am sure you share my relief that things are now finally beginning to feel much better. The roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccines has, I think, been nothing less than extraordinary. I read earlier this week that over 34 million of us have now had our first dose, and over 13 million have had their second. We are now seeing the clear effect vaccines are having on numbers of hospitalisations and deaths, both of which have fallen dramatically. I have said for many months that the vaccine is the way out of this pandemic, and although we still need to continue with our infection control measures such as wearing PPE as additional lines of defence, I am now very hopeful that things will be much easier come the summer.

Talking of the vaccines, you may have seen that the government is consulting on proposals to make it compulsory for people working in care homes where any residents are over 65 to be vaccinated against Covid-19. After discussing this with my Group Executive Team colleagues, I can let you know that Dimensions will be responding to say that we do not support this change. We know that the vaccine reduces the chances of people getting seriously ill, but as yet there is no firm evidence that getting vaccinated stops people spreading the virus. There are lots of reports and commentary suggesting that this may be another, and a really important, benefit of getting vaccinated – but there is no solid research evidence saying that. We also do not consider that care homes with people over 65 should be singled out. Throughout the pandemic the government has unhelpfully set out different rules and expectations for care homes and for supported living services. If compulsory vaccinations are about keeping people alive, then we believe and will argue that the expectation should apply in all care settings, including the NHS.

Having said that, we are continuing to encourage all our colleagues and the people we support to get vaccinated, and I am pleased to share with you there is a high take-up of the vaccine so far. We are not insisting that all current colleagues get vaccinated, but we are about to make willingness to

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get vaccinated a requirement of all new starters. I will, of course, keep you informed of any changes in our policy regarding vaccination.

I am delighted to say that the improved situation now means that visiting your loved ones outside or, in some cases, inside is much easier. Attached to this letter is a summary of our current rules regarding visits indoors. While outdoor visits, including in back gardens, are still our preferred option, it is now possible for two regular designated visitors to meet loved ones indoors if the visit is fully risk assessed and visitors return a negative rapid coronavirus test – this applies to Registered Care Homes and also to shared supported living settings if outdoor visits are not possible and not having visitors indoors would cause distress to the person we support. And restrictions look set to be eased still further from 17th May, when up to six people or two households will be able to mix indoors in England, although this still needs to be confirmed by the government.

If you have any questions about our current visiting policies, please speak to your loved one's locality manager. For general enquiries, remember that you can contact our helpline for families (open from 9.30am to 1.30pm, Monday to Friday) on 0300 303 9161 or by email at family.helpline@dimensions-uk.org.

Finally, I would like to share with you some personal news. Both I and my Executive Team colleague Jackie Fletcher, who holds the post of Director of Quality, Public Affairs and Marketing, have separately and independently taken our own decisions to leave Dimensions in March 2022. We have both worked for Dimensions since the early 1990s, in a wide variety of roles. For both of us it has been an enormous privilege to contribute to the leadership of this organisation.

We're proud of what we have all achieved over the years and we have some incredibly talented and experienced colleagues and leaders across the Dimensions Group. There is much we can and will do to continue reinforcing our position as a trusted provider of the highest quality support. I would like to assure you that whilst there will be a couple of changes in the Executive Team, our values and our fundamental commitment to keeping your loved one safe and supporting them to flourish will remain as strong as ever. If this news does raise any concerns, you are welcome to contact me directly by email at steve.scown@dimensions-uk.org.

I would like to thank you once again for your ongoing understanding and support. Words cannot do justice to how difficult and upsetting the last 14 months have been for so many of us, but the light at the end of the tunnel is brighter and closer now than it has ever been. At Dimensions we are well placed to emerge into the post-pandemic era in good shape to make better lives for more people.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Scown
Chief Executive
Dimensions Group (including Discovery)

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Key points from the letter

- The pandemic has been really hard for all of us.
- The roll-out of the vaccine is making things better now.
- We continue taking precautions, like wearing PPE to keep people safe.
- The government is considering whether people who work in care homes for older people should have to be vaccinated.
- We do not believe there is enough evidence that vaccinations stop the spread of the virus, so we do not support compulsory vaccination for care home staff.
- We actively encourage people we support, colleagues and families to get vaccinated.
- Being willing to get vaccinated will soon be compulsory for all new Discovery colleagues.
- Two designated regular visitors are now able to visit people indoors if it is safe to do so, as long as they test negative for Covid-19 and wear PPE.
- From 17th May we expect restrictions on visiting to be eased further.
- Chief Executive Steve Scown will be leaving the Dimensions Group early next year.
- Executive Team member Jackie Fletcher will also be leaving at the same time, although her decision is completely unrelated to Steve's decision.
- Our values and commitment to provide the very best possible support will not change.
- Thank you for your support and understanding.

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Summary of current indoor visiting rules

- People who live in Registered Care Homes are now allowed up to two designated regular visitors indoors.
- We are also allowing two designated visitors indoors for the people we support in shared supported living if they cannot meet outdoors and if not having visitors indoors would cause them distress.
- In both cases, visitors will need to have returned a negative lateral flow test result. The government is making these available to Registered Care Homes. For visitors to supported living services, the manager will agree whether we will provide the visitors with test kits or if they will make use of the test kits now being provided free to everyone. Visitors must take the test on the day of the visit and show their result.
- Only the two nominated individuals will be able to visit inside the person's home. These individuals must be the same people for the duration of the current restrictions.
- We also ask that, where possible, visitors self-isolate for at least two days before visiting so that the result of the rapid lateral flow test they will take on arrival is more reliable.
- A risk assessment needs to be completed before any indoor visit can go ahead.
- All normal infection control measures need to be maintained, including temperature checks and the wearing of full PPE by indoor visitors.
- Visitors may hold hands, but should bear in mind that any contact increases the risk of transmission.
- All visits must be planned in advance with the locality manager.

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