



April 9, 2020

To: Revera residents in Long Term Care and their families

Dear residents and family members:

I was disheartened to read some regrettable advice in the media recently that suggested that families should remove their loved ones from their home in Long Term Care. These statements worried me because I knew they would undoubtedly cause unnecessary anxiety for our residents and their families.

The priority of Long Term Care Homes is the health and safety of the residents for whom we provide care. We do so by taking all measures to reduce the risk of transmission of respiratory viruses like COVID-19 in our homes. This includes restricting visitors into our homes, screening all staff on every shift for symptoms of COVID-19, reducing movement of staff between homes and appropriate use of personal protective equipment.

While there have outbreaks and deaths in our sector since this pandemic began, there are numerous outbreaks and deaths in our sector each year from influenza, another virus that forecasts poor outcomes for older adults with underlying health conditions. But these risks exist in the community as well. These are not the only risks in the community.

Most residents in Long Term Care are there because the level of care they require exceeded what could be provided in their homes. Many have very complex medical needs and are dependent on care staff for basic activities of daily living like toileting, bathing and dressing. Some require assistance with feeding and have modified textured diets that, if not prepared correctly, can lead to choking. Bowel and bladder incontinence require regular brief changes and skin care to prevent skin breakdown and pressure injuries. Those with impaired mobility regularly require position changes to prevent pressure injuries as well. Many residents require two people to assist with transfers in and out of bed or into the bathroom. Often, they require a mechanical lift. Trying to complete these types of transfers without training increases the risk of falls and injury, not only for the residents, but for the person providing the care.

Approximately 80% of our residents have cognitive impairment or dementia. They now recognize Long Term Care as their home and taking them to a different environment, even if it was one they lived in previously, may be unfamiliar and confusing. This can lead to agitation and behaviours that can include yelling, swearing, leaving the house, hitting and kicking. Our staff are trained to recognize when these behaviours may occur. They know that these behaviours are not intentional and come as a result of an unmet need (like being hungry, being thirsty, having to use the toilet, having pain, etc.). These behaviours can be frightening if you are unfamiliar with how to respond to them.

When medical care or behaviours associated with dementia become too difficult to manage at home, people are often sent to the emergency department. This is not the appropriate place for older persons with underlying health conditions, especially those with dementia. Persons with dementia are much more likely to develop delirium in hospital which can result in physical and chemical restraints. They also have a higher risk of developing hospital-acquired infections and pressure injuries and research has shown that they generally do poorly, with worsening cognition and function even after they are discharged.

We have well-trained, compassionate staff who are passionate about providing care to your loved ones, who will follow established protocols during outbreaks, including COVID-19 and will do everything we can to continue to provide safe and effective care.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rhonda Collins
Chief Medical Officer, Revera