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Date: 15 September 2020

Dear residents, patients and relatives

Autumn is now officially upon us, and we continue to live in forever changing times with restrictions on our everyday lives being put in place, and then relaxed again, and then changed again. Local lockdowns, overall changes to travelling, and restrictions on who and where we can meet up, are a part of all of our lives as everyone does their best to contain the virus, and the Governments continually review and adapt to a constantly changing picture.

This can be difficult for all of us, for our staff, for our residents and patients, and for you as relatives of loved ones living in our care homes and hospitals. We continue to do our best to update you as things change and we commit to doing that, even when the news is not good.

We know that many of you have really appreciated the outdoor visiting, and you have been incredibly supportive of what we are trying to do, and for that we are forever grateful. Hopefully now everyone has been able to see a loved one on at least a weekly basis, outdoor or indoors for those exceptional circumstances in line with public health guidance, and we know you are enjoying this, as are your loved ones. Understandably your thoughts are turning to the winter months and times when outdoor visiting will be extremely limited, and in some cases not possible, and we have been working hard on a solution for this.

We have looked at a number of options that balance infection control, support your visiting needs and that adhere to Government guidance. There is not a 'one size fits all' solution, but we are currently evaluating every service to see if an indoor room that is accessible both internally and externally is able to be utilised, creating an internal space that is hygienic, and sealed to control airflow and prevent transference of the virus, and where this isn't possible whether a pod in the garden or car park could work. Please be assured that we are doing our best to look at how we can accommodate this, and as soon as an acceptable solution is in place we will communicate this with you. In the meantime we hope you continue with your current visiting plans, in line with Public Health, which is a continuing changing picture.

As we have previously mentioned we are launching an online visitor booking system, and you will shortly be receiving communication regarding this, which will enable you to easily book a visit online, and enable us to manage the volume of visitors, and track and trace in a more co-ordinated way. If you do not have access to the internet there will be an option to telephone the home to secure a visiting slot. It will launch initially to book outdoor visiting with indoor visiting to follow.

Testing continues to be a big focus for us, and has provided a number of challenges over the last few weeks. You may have heard in the news recently that whilst there is plenty of testing kits, there are issues with capacity in the testing laboratories, which is causing issues for the volume of testing, and this has impacted us. We are pleased to be able to report that we have had reassurance from the Department of Health and Social Care that this issue is going to be resolved imminently, and as of this past weekend we have been re-starting the process of testing staff every week, and our residents every 28 days in England. In Wales and Scotland testing for residents is happening on an adhoc basis and more routinely where there is an outbreak, and there is weekly testing of staff in place in Scotland and fortnightly testing of staff in Wales. As you know we believe, that until a vaccine is available, this is the best way we can protect our residents, patients and staff.

We appreciate that there has been increased media coverage regarding cases rising in care homes, currently we have 3 residents who are actively positive (0.02%) and 24 members of staff (0.2%). Whilst we appreciate that we have had to take some draconian measures, we are assured that this is the right thing to do to try and keep our residents, patients and staff protected. We know that you have, on occasions, challenged us about further opening up, as you have seen other care homes do this, however we believe that our approach balances infection control, supports your visiting needs and adheres to Government guidance

We are still not opening up our services to external entertainment or beauty services as we believe that this further opens us up to the risk of infection. However it is great to see so many of our staff who have taken to cutting and styling hair for our residents and patients, and we think there could be even more budding hairdressers out there, and we are actively encouraging this. The harvest festival season is coming and there are lots of fun competitions for residents and patients to get involved in.

We know this is a really testing time for everyone, and as always we will continue to do all we can to keep you updated but please don't hesitate to contact us with your queries and concerns, or your gratitude and thanks, and we will continue to do our best to respond as quickly as we can. You can do this through the General Manager or Hospital Director, or through our team at Feedback@barchester.com. Our only ask is that you do this with kindness and courtesy to the teams that are doing their very best to help, and we know you will.

Sending our very best wishes to you and your families.

Dr Pete Calveley
CEO Barchester Healthcare

Julia Atherton
Director of Nursing

We are sending this with the best intentions and with the latest data we have. If this causes offence we are deeply sorry.

