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Date: 13 October 2020

Dear residents, patients and relatives

In these forever changing times we hope that you and your families are doing well, and for those that are able to visit, we hope you are continuing to enjoy spending time with your loved ones, however limited that might be.

We are conscious that there has been updated guidance on visiting care homes in Scotland from the Scottish Government and further to this the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, who clarified earlier today that this guidance was not mandatory, and that it was for care homes to form their own judgement in the light of the circumstances, and therefore we felt it important to clarify our position to you.

It is vital to ensure that we are resuming any visiting safely, and we are authorised to do what our risk assessment permits. Mindful of our responsibility in keeping the most vulnerable people in society as safe as possible, and with a backdrop of a steady increase in the prevalence of the virus in the wider population, the current government guidelines on not associating with other households, the lack of testing available to visitors, and the risk that a significant rise in indoor visiting would pose for our dedicated staff, we are moving with great caution on this.

As you know we have been working hard to ensure that you can visit as safely as possible, and we know many of you are enjoying outdoor visiting and we are working hard to introduce designated visiting rooms for the winter. However, for those residents not able to have an outdoor visit due to lack of mobility this has been difficult. Therefore we will enable a designated visitor for those residents who are not able to have outdoor visits. In this case the potential visit will be risk-assessed and the visit will be supervised, ensuring that social distancing is adhered to. At this point touching and personal support is too much of a risk, and compromises the safety of our residents, and this is not something that we are going to enable to happen. It is also important that we are able to manage this appropriately, and therefore will be enabling these indoor visits for 30 mins only and they will be supervised.

A further element to clarify is that the Government guidance now allows for 6 people to attend outdoor visits including children under 18. As we are allowing more than one resident to have an outdoor visit at any given time, we would ask that visiting is for a maximum of 3 people from up to 2 separate households and unfortunately no children under the age of 11 years, to ensure that we don't have too many people in the outdoor space at any given time, and that social distancing can be adhered to.

As mentioned above we are introducing visiting rooms, enabling outdoor visits where possible, and essential compassionate visits which we know are hugely important. We continue to balance the wellbeing of our staff, residents and patients with their safety, with the backdrop of an increasing spread of the virus in many communities.

As we have stated previously, we are working hard to ensure that where possible, visiting can continue throughout the winter, and already have 22 homes with designated visiting rooms or pods that are designed with both comfort and safety in mind. The visiting room or pod is similar to a living room with comfortable furnishings, and internal heating to create a welcoming and warm environment for you. It is also hygienic and sealed to prevent transference of the virus, and therefore has an intercom system fitted so you will be able to hear your loved one clearly, and engage in conversation. We have had really great feedback on these already, and we hope you enjoy them throughout the coming months. The General Manager will be in touch to tell you when, and if, this room will be available. In the meantime we are still enabling outdoor visiting where possible.

The number of residents and patients in our homes and hospitals currently with COVID-19 has increased slightly, although we are pleased to say remains very low. Testing continues to be a big focus for us, and we are testing our staff every week. Unfortunately testing is still not available to us for visitors, but we look forward to when this is. We are working hard to be part of a research programme on antibody testing in England, with 500 staff having had this test already to understand the relationship between antigen and antibody testing results. This may help us understand risk going forward. In addition to this we are excited to be part of a small pilot with 3 homes to look at something called 'Lateral flow testing', which is looking at on site testing with results back within 30 minutes, which could further enhance our ability to keep our residents and staff safe, and our hope would be that it could enable further visiting.

We are constantly looking at ways we can limit risk of COVID -19 coming into our homes and hospitals, and have been discussing working arrangements with our staff to understand who is working in other care settings, and looking at ways we can limit this. Needless to say every staff members' case will be different, and it is important that we do all we can to support them to work in a way that suits their and their families' needs, whilst keeping our residents protected.

We are pleased to say that we successfully held our Care Awards on Thursday last week. This is normally held face to face with a lunch and an awards ceremony, but needless to say that couldn't happen in the same way this year. It is so important that our staff are recognised and thanked for their hard work, passion and commitment to keeping our residents and patients safe and well, and this year we held this virtually with a live link to the homes and hospitals that were divisional winners. It was such a lovely day with staff, residents and patients all getting involved, celebrating success, and thoroughly enjoying what was a very emotional day. We are totally humbled by the resilience they have, and continue to show, and this day shone an even brighter spotlight on that. Thank you so much for all your nominations this year, we had over a 1000 more than any other year, which, to us, demonstrates the appreciation that you, and we all have for the great work being done.



We appreciate that these messages are difficult to communicate and that some of you will be disappointed, and maybe angry with us. Please respect that we are doing our very best to balance the wellbeing of relatives and loved ones, our residents and staff with their safety, and this means that we have to take difficult decisions. We will keep reviewing the situation and update you as much as possible. 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 through our team at [Feedback@barchester.com](mailto: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.

