



Symphony Senior Living
In concert with your life

May 29, 2020

Update on Covid for Residents, Family and Team Members

Dear Residents, Families and Team Members,

We remain Covid free at all communities, thanks to all of you for your help and support. We had hoped to see some direction from the Minister of Health on “reopening” for our sector. Unfortunately, with the issues surrounding Long Term Care (LTC) properties in Ontario and Quebec, and the recent public reports and issues, I fear we will get caught up in the same regulations and a one size fits all approach, that they have been working with since the beginning of the pandemic.

We have known since day one of this Pandemic (and 20 years before that, to be honest) that LTC and Retirement homes are substantially different in a few keys ways; that said, I also realized very early on how vulnerable our population was and with or without “regulation and government direction” we needed to think for ourselves and implement what was needed to safely and effectively self-isolate and reduce the likely sources of virus entering the home. With some luck and a lot of thinking and diligent work, we remain Covid free and our residents still enjoy a good amount of socialization and interaction both inside the communities and virtually with their loved ones.

Re-opening to scheduled, distanced, outdoor family visits:

We have been waiting for some direction on this but given the LTC Ontario environment I think we need to start planning for ourselves. We hope in the next few weeks maybe some direction will arise, but this is what we would like to propose as a next step.

Starting June 15th, we will schedule family and very close friends (where family may not be available) for outdoor distance visits. We will have a location where you can visit but still be physically separated by at least 6 ft. Each home is identifying an area that the family can access from outside the building and the resident from inside, with perhaps a table between and chairs on both sides, with some refreshments. The visits need to be scheduled in advance, the guests will be screened for symptoms and temperature and provided a mask if you don't have one and hand sanitizer. If the weather is bad, we will either accommodate with shelter or reschedule. The visits will be chaperoned by a staff member – sorry – but for now especially with our dementia residents, we need to ensure no close contact.

I had to think of how to make it fair as to who goes first 😊 outside of gravely ill residents (which you still have access to even now with guidelines), I decided age would go before beauty so to speak. So, our eldest residents first. There will always be exceptions to this, so if you or your loved ones are having a particularly hard time right now with depression, isolation or anxiety, please talk to the Executive director and they will accommodate you for a visit sooner rather than later.

As may of you know, we did start running our buses again, limited to the residents and staff with masks and no stops. We also carry on board a safety box with more masks incase we break down and the residents encounter anyone else that is unmasked. These have been going over well, and the trips have been a welcome break from our normal routine.

We are constantly looking for ways to stay engaged, social and healthy. Any suggestions please feel free to let us know.



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Public Health Units and Testing:

We updated you last time about where we stand with being ready and willing for testing of all Staff and Residents. We have responded to various surveys, last weekend (one survey received on a Saturday night 6pm to be responded to by Sunday 6pm – no news 5 days later on why or what we did that for) and other requests that seem to be lining things up for testing, but I won't deceive you we have heard nothing on this front. Communication to us is very limited.

From what we can see the Public Health units are overwhelmed with the situation in Long Term Care. If we call-in we can wait 45 min or more on hold to try and track down a lab result or talk to someone.

My comment on the last letter was how testing turn around had shortened, which was very positive for risk management of admissions and anyone with symptoms; both staff and residents. I have to say the results now are again delayed. We have had several tests sent in the past few weeks and now they are taking longer and longer to get results. On average we are again waiting 4-5 days for results. We are currently waiting on a staff result sent in 4 days ago and a resident test also 4 days ago. The staff are not allowed to work during this time and the resident is isolated with full PPE and limited staff to one on one care as it is a resident with dementia that wanders.

Hopefully, the province can resolve the issues in the testing situation shortly and we see improvement; until then we are handling each situation individually and with all we can do. Honestly, if I could send the results to a private lab we would, but that is not an option in our public system.

Communications from Hospitals and/or Public Health:

We recently had a situation where a resident went to ER for a procedure then released in less than 24 hours back to us. A few days later, family received a call that their loved one had been exposed to hospital staff with Covid at the hospital. We were not contacted by the hospital or public health, even though the information package sent to the hospital had our contact information on multiple pages of the documents, thank heavens the family immediately called us. Regardless, we had already taken a swab for a test as is our protocol and initiated 14 isolation. We increased the level to include full PPE use AND dedicated staffing.

Please if you are notified like this, we may not have been, and let us know immediately. As you know, our protocol is to contact family prior to sending to ER and we are very reluctant to send anyone to ER unless truly necessary. We understand now that there are staff at Hospitals with active Covid but no symptoms, that are deemed essential and are working, hence the risk can be higher than normal to contract Covid. We plan to assess each situation as it arises: but with dementia residents and wandering especially, if an ER visit is necessary we will do testing on arrival back and then again in four days, using full PPE and limiting the staff that attend that resident and others when ever possible.

Lab Work and Foot Care:

During the past 2.5 months we have been doing our own lab specimen draws or have had very little needing to be done. As things progress several requests that had been delayed could no longer be delayed. In our ongoing effort to "inhouse" any services so you don't have to go to a clinic or have another agency staff enter the building, we decided to get all our sites not yet trained in blood draws trained. Our regional director of



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wellness is trained to train others and in conjunction with our lab supplier and doctors, we will be able to offer lab services and blood draws on site. We must put in place some equipment and finalize the training that is happening currently, and all communities will be able to provide services inhouse and then send samples to the lab to process.

This is the same for Foot Care. We have been snipping away where we can 😊 but for more complicated needs we need a trained foot care nurse. Luckily again, Connie, our Regional Director of Wellness is a trained foot care nurse. She has been self-isolating and working from home to ensure she can attend any needed onsite issues or lend a hand, so she will be attending any complicated or requests for foot care at this time. Again, we need to get some new equipment and services for this added service we will soon offer in house. I personally asked if we can get a paraffin warmer, I know there are more serious issues, but some nice soft feet are still appreciated by many!

Staffing:

Our staffing levels have held up quite well and the team has been wonderful, creative and supportive. We are experiencing some decrease in occupancy and have started to work with the staff to take some needed and owed vacation. We are trying to ensure our staff have full time hours where needed and wanted and part time where that works too. We must be careful, as you know, we are not funded by the government we are funded by the residents and families and so we have to be efficient in our staffing levels. That said, we have had some good discussions with the team to facilitate vacations instead of hours reductions. We are aware that the fall could see another spike in Covid and/or at anytime we could end up in outbreak, with just one staff member or one resident testing positive and the demand on operations would increase while in outbreak.

We are looking for RPNs (Registered Practical Nurses) at most properties we need 1 or 2 both full and part time is available. We are advertising on Indeed for those positions, so if you know anyone, please send them our way! We have a fun group of team members and competitive wages and good working conditions. Its hard work but rewarding work and with fun people....and animals too!

We all very much appreciate the support and patience of our residents, their families and loved ones. The kinds words have been very encouraging, making long days - short and it all worthwhile. We will continue to keep you informed as things open or other items develop. Have a look on our website to see your comments and notes of appreciation sent in on Facebook for the team. They are now loaded on the first page.

If you have any questions or concerns, please talk to your Executive Director or myself.

Sincerely,

Lisa Brush
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