



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
Ministerial Correspondence and Public Enquiries
Unit 39
Victoria Street
London
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12th November 2020

Dear the Rt Hon Matt Hancock

Re: Visits to care homes and people with dementia

Approximately 850,000 people in the UK suffer from dementia, and 69% of those live in care homes. Of the total care home population, 70% have dementia. As you are aware, care homes were hit particularly hard by covid-19, which meant that of the total number of people who have died directly from the virus, a large proportion – 27.5% – had dementia.

Since March, care homes have been in lockdown. This makes life particularly hard for those who are suffering from dementia and for their families. The current guidance does allow for family visits but the requirement for floor-to-ceiling screens and separate entrances often makes this impossible. The closed “window visits” that are also suggested in the guidance also provide no meaningful social contact between care home residents and their visitors, and video or phone calls can be confusing and distressing.

For those suffering from dementia, social isolation has consequences for their condition. Without exercising their cognitive skills, it makes it far more likely they will lose them. The number of excess deaths caused by coronavirus is hard to establish exactly, but between January and July of this year deaths from dementia were 52% higher than usual. It is not unreasonable to infer that these deaths are in no small part due to the lockdown conditions, and the social isolation imposed on care home residents with dementia.

Given the adverse effect of the lockdown on those suffering with dementia and their families, I support the Alzheimer’s Society’s four asks of government:

- Allowing for at least one informal carer per care home resident to be designated a key worker, with access to training, COVID-19 testing/ vaccinations and PPE.
- Where care homes are unable to facilitate visits from loved ones, they must be required to notify the CQC and be required to put in place appropriate arrangements to maintain contact between loved ones and residents.
- Performance in enabling safe visiting and meeting cultural needs should also form part of the CQC’s inspection framework during the pandemic.

- DHSC should rapidly co-produce with a small group of care providers and others a highly practical toolkit for care homes on how to implement the Visiting Guidance safely, drawing on best practice.

I urge you to implement these measures so that we can provide the support that people with dementia desperately need during the pandemic.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'O Blake', written in a cursive style.

Olivia Blake MP