



IASW

Irish Association of Social Workers
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibríthe Sóisialta

Dr Ronan Glynn
Acting Chief Medical Officer
HSE Dept of Health
Department of Health,
Block 1, Miesian Plaza,
50 – 58 Lower Baggot Street,
D02 XW14

Re. Reinstating and Maintaining Family Visits to Nursing Homes

23rd September 2020

Dear Dr Glynn,

I wish to draw your attention to some creative ways in which physical visiting between nursing home residents and family members have been facilitated elsewhere during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Irish Association of Social Workers hopes that NPHET will consider fully all available avenues to reinstate and maintain family visits within nursing home and residential care settings in Ireland within all levels of the new nine-month government plan.

Social Workers are highly engaged in the nursing homes sector. Working in fields such as primary care, medical social work, adult safeguarding, disability, mental health and palliative care, Social Workers support people in moving into nursing homes, for short term respite or on a permanent basis. Social Workers also support people when they are inappropriately placed in nursing home care, and in certain circumstances, Social Workers investigate allegations of abuse and neglect of nursing home residents. Social Workers have provided a much-needed liaison bereavement service in some nursing homes during the pandemic. IASW members are well positioned therefore to express their increased concerns about the cumulative negative impact of repeated visiting restrictions on the mental health, emotional and physical well-being of residents, who are yearning to see the people they love.

While we fully appreciate the delicate balance NPHET must consider when providing public health guidance around visiting arrangements, we are concerned that the emphasis of the national response remains focused solely on protection, with little consideration given to the benefits of creative engagement with design and structural solutions which may increase the possibility of safe visiting.

We wish to draw your attention to the successful efforts within the UK and Netherlands to maintain visiting. The Freemantle Trust has 11 care homes in the UK with 1100 residents. Using risk assessment and risk management tools, all 11 care homes have successfully managed outdoor family visiting since the end of May. They have also reinstated indoor visits. No infection has been associated with the visits.

You may also be aware of the study of 26 nursing homes within the Netherlands which again successfully reinstated a one visitor policy with no rise in infection.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7294280/>

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In other parts of the Netherlands, glass cabins have been used to facilitate visiting without incidence of infection. I have attached relevant reading to this letter. Warm winter gardens, dedicated use of rooms to facilitate window visiting and ventilated indoor visiting may all provide opportunity to manage risks associated with visiting.

Residents and their families need hope – hope that the same energy is placed into re-instating their human right to connection with those they love, as is being placed into protecting them from infection from Covid-19. Vulnerable groups must also be considered as priority groups – recognising that as they are likely to experience the severest of restrictions, they should also receive priority investment and attention to ensure that all efforts are made to return their lives to some semblance of normality. While this effort is clear with the reopening of schools, the same is not clear for our dependent elderly living in nursing homes, where people are at the end of their life and have often already limited opportunities to build new memories with their families and loved ones.

The IASW are requesting that the above and all other international evidence, is considered by NPHET and that new voices and expertise from design and innovation industries are engaged to proactively work on solutions so that we can physically reconnect families as quickly as possible. Ireland can take a leadership role in alleviating the human suffering associated with visiting restrictions. The Netherlands study and the Freemantle trust both provide templates under which a trial of visiting could be conducted during Level 3 Restrictions in a select number of homes.

IASW appreciates your work during the pandemic. Your professional expertise and ability to communicate with clarity and compassion is evident.

Should you require any further information regarding these matters, please do not hesitate to contact me on 086 2932164.

Yours sincerely,

Aine McGuirk,
Chair
SW004099

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