

P-05-1041 A clear policy and funding for hospitals and care homes for virtual visiting during times of lockdown, Correspondence – Care Forum Wales to Committee, 24.08.21

My apologies for the delay in response

As you will appreciate the issue of visiting care homes has been a developing one during the period of the pandemic. As you note in your research document <https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s500005730/Research%20brief.pdf> many care homes chose to close their doors to non-essential visitors before being officially advised to do so. This was proved to have been the right decision given the devastation wreaked by covid in care homes. Obviously care homes entered the pandemic with varying abilities to facilitate online contact, both in terms of equipment and staff expertise, and had many other new issues to deal with in terms of infection control to try to keep residents safe. Some care homes were able to get up and running very quickly in facilitating online contact between residents and loved ones whilst others had more challenges. Again as you note funding was announced in April 2020 and then made available with varying degrees of speed through local authorities. The first tranche of funding which ran until July was made available in a way that allowed care homes to justify covid-related expenditure without a specific limit or pot for them so that it was not the case that spending on digital connectivity meant they could not also spend on infection control. However, it is fair to say that in the administration through local authorities, some showed more flexibility than others and some made it harder to claim than others. We did our best to assist our members across Wales in navigating this system by sharing information, providing advice and taking up individual cases. There was also the provision of tablets through Digital Communities Wales to facilitate online communication with those who would normally have visited. However, some care homes also needed greater investment in infrastructure such as wifi or wifi extenders which took time (as well as money) to organise safely. And some care homes had staff cohorts that were more able to facilitate such access than others.

Obviously, things have now developed considerably and we are now on version 10 of the visiting guidance <https://gov.wales/visits-care-homes-guidance-providers-html>. Care Forum Wales has been pleased to have been involved in discussions with CIW and Welsh Government officials around the ongoing development of this guidance. We note that the petitioner is concerned about difference in visiting practice. However, we need to recognise each care home is different in its physical layout and ability to accommodate visiting and whether or not it had access one of the Welsh Government provided visiting pods. Each care home also has a different clientele: facilitating safe visiting for a mobile resident with dementia presents different challenges to visiting for someone who is being nursed in bed.

We would also point out that it is not just care home residents who have had their freedom to associate in person limited during this time: we all have. There are two added issues when managing contact with people who live in care homes to the general population: firstly the risk is not just to them but to others who live in the same place and the balancing of individual and collective rights has proved challenging; secondly those who live in care homes are likely to be more vulnerable to covid-19 by virtue of age and / or other frailties. This was recognised by prioritising care home residents for vaccination. However, it remains the case that a vaccinated 80 year old has roughly the same risk from covid of an unvaccinated 50 year old - i.e. not a negligible one – even before taking into account other comorbidities.

I hope this is helpful to the committee's deliberations

With all best wishes

Mary

Mary Wimbury

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Care Forum Wales / Fforwm Gofal Cymru