

Dear Relatives of St Michaels Homes,

We hope you are all keeping safe & well.

This is the first newsletter we have done jointly between the care homes before the start of this crisis. Reason why we have done a joint newsletter as both homes seem to be on the same page at present so thought it best to do one newsletter to all rather than two, should you wish for more personal information about what is happening within either home please look us up on our Facebook page which gives a lot more stories, photos and up to date news on the goings on within each home.



Matters keep changing daily and we have been trying our best to keep up with an ever changing world, however we believe we are seeming to be getting to grips with most things that are being pushed our way in a calm and professional manner. It will always be our policy to be "open & honest" with you all, we appreciate that this is such a challenging & scary time for us all. We also are very aware of how sad it is that you are not able to visit your loved ones. All our staff members have really stepped up and are trying to bridge the gap currently between residents and relatives and spending the time with them as if they were part of their own family.

Residents

Most all the residents seem to be well and are in good spirits, with the sun out lately making it nice that we have all been able to spend time in the gardens and soak up the sun. We would like to welcome all the new admissions into the homes from the community or in some cases from other care homes, these residents, as always, have been tested and placed into isolation within their bedroom for 14 days to make sure they are free from any infection. They are now all out isolation and settling in well within the home's environment.

Dudbrook Hall has one resident as having COVID, this residents family have been notified and we have now put them into isolation within their bedroom and following all policies and procedures to make sure this virus is retained and all other residents and staff are kept safe. This resident is stable and has not shown any symptoms apart from testing positive. Staff continue to monitor and provide care for this resident without the need for hospital intervention. We have two other residents who are currently in hospital for other related matters which are not related to the virus, the hospital have now confirmed that all readmissions from hospital will be tested prior to discharge however we will also be isolating them within their room on arrival back to the homes to make sure.

Howard Lodge currently has no one who has COVID19. The last resident who had the virus we were able to care for him within the home and he has now made a full recovery and is no longer contagious. We did have one other resident who had gone into hospital for a fall however they are now back with us and tested negative on leaving the hospital, this resident has been placed within his bedroom as a precautionary measure for the time being, he too is making a good recovery.

Both homes continue to monitor all resident's temperature, oxygen levels, and general wellbeing. We are also monitoring staff temperature and in some cases oxygen levels as this seems to be a common factor with this virus.

Our activities teams are looking at new ways to bring some laughter and happiness back into the homes and we are now planning a host of many different activities/events within the homes over the coming weeks and months, please be sure to look at for photos on our Facebook/Instagram pages, we will also try and get photos onto our webpage for those who don't have an account.

Some of the planned activities coming up in the weeks and months ahead will be a Virtual Southend Trip, Afternoon Tea, Sports day with staff members competing against each other with hopefully some of the residents taking part if they wish to join in, Flower show we are going to try and get residents and staff to take up flower arrangement etc which will then be judged by a panel of experts, Saturday 27th June – Armed Forces Day – We are going to dress up, provide a war time menu and music throughout the day, Wimbledon week – W/c 06th July, Hawaii theme day, Royal Ascot day – providing a picnic lunch and light tea in the gardens wait until you see the horses 😊

We are now becoming hopeful that the past couple of months are finally behind us and we do feel like the outbreaks that occurred seem to now be under control and they are finally behind us. We are not going to be complacent and will keep up with all of our heavy duty cleaning throughout the days, all staff wearing PPE and making sure all our residents are safe and secure at all times, and will continue to monitor of staff and residents. We do now feel that the support from government has finally come through and we seem to be getting the same support as the NHS which is great to see as many months we did feel like we were all on our own during this crisis, with testing now taken place and also the support we are getting to from NHS and local government has finally come through.

Staffing

Our staff in all the different sectors continues to serve through rain or shine as a great example for the dedication, kindness, and empathy in dealing with this crisis.

Caring for the carers and staff on the front line is equally important and "Mental Health Awareness week has come at a particularly salient time this year. As care workers, on the front line of this pandemic, it is of the utmost important they look after their own mental health and wellbeing and we will be providing them with all the support they need from our own councillors and other agencies / support groups which have been setup to help and support them.

If there is anything, we can take from this crisis which we have always known is the importance of key workers and our work force and the important work they do for us and the most vulnerable in our community. We hope now government will now look at social care as important as the NHS for the future.

Most of our staff have now returned from isolation and we are now fully staffed within both the homes. Staff have been so proactive and taken themselves into isolation if their family members or if they had any symptoms. All staff have looked to minimise any possible way of catching the virus by only coming from home to work, in many cases not even going shopping and getting food delivered to them or using our suppliers to deliver food for them and their families at the care homes. As you can appreciate this is true dedication to our residents & their fellow colleagues. On behalf of the directors we would like to thank them for all they have done and continue to do.

Staff across the care homes have received chocolates, cards, gifts, cakes, treats & food delivery from local takeaways delivering free food to staff on shift, words can't express how thankful we are for the support and love shown to all our incredible staff, thank you.

If you wish to give anything towards the staff then we have setup a just giving pages for those who wish to contribute, however small or large as we understand we are all facing financial hardships,

all donations will be shared out to the staff who have worked so hard on the front line during this crisis. They will be incredibly grateful for any contribution along with your kind words and notes of encouragement/support.

Howard Lodge Key Workers Fund; <https://www.gofundme.com/f/howard-lodge-key-workers-fund>

Dudbrook Hall Key Workers Fund: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/dudbrook-hall-key-workers-fund>

Testing

Finally, with testing now at a point where it is making a difference we believe. With trying to fight this hidden virus anyone could be carriers & not show any symptoms so that's why is so important to establish a good testing system within the caring environment to test residents and staff to try and discover this virus early so we can put reactive measures in place to limit it spreading any further within the homes. Obviously, this is a government guideline if anyone is averse to your loved one being tested then can you please contact us immediately, otherwise we will take this as your permission.

To give you a summarized timeline of what has happened with us concerning testing.

- No testing was offered at the start of this crisis in early March for residents or staff, only residents who had gone into hospital from care homes were tested to determine what they were dealing with, Residents were not tested on release from hospital. Staff with any symptoms where just told to isolate themselves for 14days, this did have a massive affect on our staffing levels at the time and made us rely heavily on agency staffing to cover the shortage.
- 10th April. Residents within a care home who showed symptoms where then offered a home test. In many cases we had to wait for the results for long periods of time, which was not good, however all these residents who we classed as high risk were treated as if they were positive. Staff were not offered any testing at this stage.
- We were able to start testing staff only if they showed symptoms as from 20th April from testing centers, however many of these testing centers were becoming further and further away from us. Some staff having to drive to Barking to be tested or Stansted were our nearest sites at the time were, and there was no consideration for those staff who did not drive. We were also able to offer testing of family members of staff if they showed symptoms.
- 5th May we started to obtain home testing kits for residents only but had to wait for direction from the community nursing team as to whom would be eligible to be tested & for this to be carried out by the community team.
- Mid May we where given the go ahead to test all residents within care homes and they arranged for mass testing of all residents at Dudbrook Hall whether they were showing symptoms or not, this testing was completed by an external testing company on behalf of the NHS.
- 20th May we obtained many more home testing kits for all residents of Howard Lodge, we are now being shown how to conduct the tests ourselves and complete all the necessary paperwork to send off to the lab. We have also been given the go ahead to test all staff within both homes which is currently being arranged.

As you can see things have moved quickly over the last month on testing and we feel we have now been given the tools and training which will make a big change in our fight against this virus and to help us keep our residents and staff safe.

Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)

Another concern that the government never really got to grips with during this crisis was the lack of PPE. We have been asking the local and wider government that all PPE for NHS and social care should be free for those who are working on the front line, this will never be the case due to the global demand for these items.

Our housekeeping managers in both the homes have been working tirelessly to monitor our stock levels of masks, gloves, aprons, sanitizer & cleaning products and keep them at adequate levels. We have now purchased large amounts of these items so that we have a minimum of a month worth of stock on all essential items and have setup a central store for the homes. The prices we are paying now compared to that of last year is nearly 600% increases in most case. We have now established some good suppliers who seem to be working hard to only supply care homes with all required PPE.

We are very proud that we have been able to give the maximum amount and more protection for our residents & staff, and that PPE has never been to very low levels we have heard of many care homes who have totally run out of most supplies which is dreadful.

Isolation unit @ Howard Lodge

We have not had the need to use our isolation unit within Howard Lodge during this crisis, thankfully. The isolation unit will be used for anyone who has confirmed COVID19 or suspected who will not isolate within his or her bedroom. This isolation unit will remain empty until we believe it is safe for those residents who move out to return to their bedrooms, however we are forever mindful that the country may get a second spike which might affect us in the future, We hope this will not be the case and will continue to remain empty and will be closely monitored.

Communications

This has been something of a concern for us as we understand how important it is for residents to remain in touch with their loved ones and this is the same for your relatives of residents within our care. We hope that our Facebook page, WhatsApp group, Instagram, newsletter, facetime chats are all working well. Please can I ask that you only phone the care homes after 10am until 12 and then again not to call until after 1:30pm just so we can get past our most busy periods, please if its urgent please call us anytime.

Hopefully you are being kept fully informed of all that is happening within the homes via our Facebook page, Instagram newsletters, video calling & WhatsApp messages among some of the communications we are using during this crisis to keep in touch. We also hope you have managed to come along to see your loved one via an open window/doorway or via our staff using their phones or via our video messaging if there is anything else we can do to keep us all talking then please let us know we will try and do it.

Hospital admissions

We have had some concerns from relatives about us sending residents into hospital, we would only be advised on this by a medical professional with your involvement. We understand there is many who are fearing to come into hospital at present and we will try our best to limit all visits into hospital as much as possible, however sometimes they would be more comfortable in a hospital environment than not going at all where the situation could become a lot worse. We will do all we can to keep you informed and your agreement will be requested as best we can at the time.

Thank you so much for your continued support during this challenging time, we promise with our team to care for your loved one as if they were one of our own. As I am sure you can understand we are a family firm and family mean so much for us, we feel like the residents and staff are part of our St Michaels Homes family. We are truly honored that we can do the job that we do looking after our beautiful residents.

When we can all meet again, we promise to have the biggest & best party to celebrate us rejoining together again. Please do not hesitate to contact us by email or call if any concerns/questions so we can get back to you.

Regards,

Sean, Claire & Sheila Watson

Directors