

Care Home Virtual Visits Report

How Swindon care homes have managed during COVID-19

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to engage with care homes in the Swindon area by way of Enter and View visits (face to face visits by Healthwatch staff and volunteers to observe how a care home works and offer constructive feedback). Since lockdown, this has no longer been a viable option. To continue engaging with care homes we came up with a short survey to find out how each home has managed and how they adapted during the pandemic, so that best practice can be established.

[The Government updated their guidance on care home visits](#) but this has been criticised by many as not being “meaningful”;

Julie Jones (2020), co-founder of Dementia Charity John’s Campaign stated:

“When people are in the later stages of dementia, when people love each other, when people are approaching the end of their lives, they need to hold hands”

By way of ‘Virtual Visits’, conducted either by telephone or video call consultation, it has been possible for us to reach out to care homes while still ensuring social distancing. During each consultation, a staff member (for the majority this was the Care Home Manager) took part in the survey, as well as at least one resident. For four care homes, it was not appropriate due to their condition such as dementia, where residents may not have capacity to take part.

Key findings

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 lockdown has had a detrimental impact on the care home residents and staff. However, care homes have used the pandemic to their advantage by rethinking the way they interact with residents, their families and staff by;

- Having a greater focus on activities for residents
- More one-to-one time being spent by staff with each resident
- Using technology, such as iPads and Skype calls, to keep connected with others

About this report

In March 2020, the UK was forced into a full lockdown due to the threat posed from COVID-19 (Coronavirus). Due to the high vulnerability of residents in care homes, it was inevitable that this would change the way that care homes and their residents would be able to maintain contact with their loved ones and the wider community, and as a result this might have an impact on residents’ wellbeing.

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The aim of this survey was to look at:

How care homes maintained contact with residents' families and the wider community, and what the barriers were to this?

This report provides a summary of:

- What worked well and
- what the key issues were for Swindon Care Homes during the COVID-19 lockdown

Positive changes that were made that can be shared with other care homes.

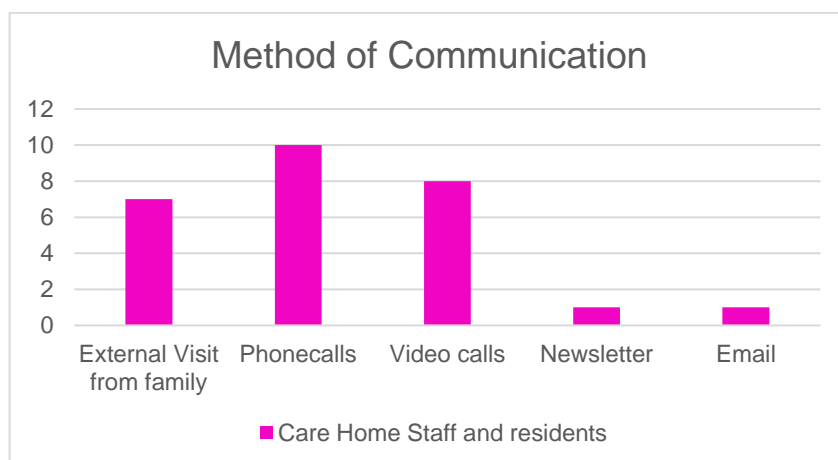
Demographics

Who are we hearing from?

We engaged with seven care homes in the Swindon area, speaking to seven care home staff members and three residents.

- Three nursing homes
- One home for people with Learning Disabilities
- Three non-nursing care homes

How have you kept residents in touch with their families?



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As you can see from the graph above, most of the homes that were contacted successfully maintained contact in a number of ways, including allowing visits from families in line with social distancing.

One particular home decided to erect a marquee in their grounds so that they could set up a private meeting space. This allowed family to have privacy with their loved one, whilst still keeping social distancing and keeping any meeting external to the home. Both the Care Home Manager and resident said that this worked really well, and although was difficult for the resident to keep socially distant, was a satisfactory compromise and was a positive experience to have face to face visits again.

Two care homes were offered extra tablets to use, one stated:

“We were given two iPads for the care home volunteers to use for video calls during lockdown which meant that more residents were able to contact their family. This worked really well and were so grateful for their help”

One care home struggled with IT issues but video calling worked well once resolved.

We spoke to one resident who celebrated his 100th birthday whilst in lockdown, he said:

“The staff organised a Zoom call with family across the world on my birthday recently which was wonderful. I have not been able to see my daughter as she had to shield due to illness...Today I am going out in the minibus and they are going to drive past my family’s home so I can wave. Such a lovely thing to organise”

How have your residents been affected by having fewer visitors? And what did you do to support them with this?

Overall, although there was a general agreement in all care homes that residents were missing close contact with their loved ones, there were several ways in which they tried to lessen the impact of this:

- Providing more activities throughout the day and evening. One care home is now recruiting another Activities Co-ordinator as they felt this was important for the benefit of the residents
- More one-to-one time being spent by staff with each resident
- Maintaining as much contact as possible with families and loved ones and offering as much support to family member as well
- Adapting communication methods for residents with dementia who might have difficulty with video calling

How have you kept residents in touch with the wider community?

“Going out is not possible. We have been going out to do the garden. We are assigned Hawthorne and have weekly callouts which has worked really well. The GP knows us well. A monthly face to face visit by nurse practitioner”

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“We have had GP virtual and face to face meetings when required. We have exchanged letters with volunteers and the local school has sent in letters and drawings”

“A volunteer organisation who was attending is now doing facetime calls and keeping in touch. One volunteer brought in fresh veg from her allotment”

“Sending card, receiving cards/ letters from school children”

As you can see from some of the quotes, care homes were able to be creative about how they maintained contact with the wider community. As they were unable to access external visitors, they were able to reach out to the local community who have been a great support.

What activities have you been able to do with residents?

Five care homes stated that they have at least one Activity Co-ordinator, although one care home stated that their Co-ordinator had some time off during lockdown due to illness. Staff organised activities with the residents included:

Garden activities;

- Having a barbecue
- Celebrating VE day
- Football
- Cricket

Indoor activities

- Board games
- Crosswords
- Halloween activities

We have taken the residents out to do gardening. We set up some virtual games

We have a full activity programme and 3 x Activity Co-ordinators who organise small, large groups, and also 1-2-1 if required.

Entertainment such as Music for health, spending time with residents giving support

Spontaneous activities as to how they feel on the day and chosen by residents. They have used traditional card games and board games.

More friendships have formed within the home. The residents have wanted to do household tasks as a natural fulfilling task. It has got them involved, and made better use of the garden room.

As you can see from the comments above, the staff have been really creative in looking at ways to keep residents occupied and entertained during lockdown. Of course, some of these activities rely on good weather, so going into the winter months, there may be more need to adapt.

One resident also stated:

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“Group activities have brought everyone closer together as it has been comforting to know we are all in this together”

What activities would you like to have done, but haven't been able to?

All of the care homes who took part stated that their residents really missed going out and visiting other places. Here are some of the barriers and ways in which they tried to overcome these:

Barriers to activity	How have they overcome this (Staff and residents feedback)
A resident had a 'milestone' birthday and we were unable to invited family	We organised a big party in-house and sang songs. The family were able to attend outside
We like to do external visits in our minibus	We took residents out for drives in the minibus. Although we could not get out, everyone enjoyed getting out on the bus for a change of scenery
We usually have entertainers come in from outside such as singers	We replicated this in-house with sing-alongs which went down really well
We had trips planned that could not go ahead	We are going to re-arrange these trips for a later date when able, so it gives us something fun to look forward to
A staff member was getting married but couldn't have a get together with friends	We arranged a hen party with the residents with games, music and food. It was a big hit!

How has residents' wellbeing been supported?

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 lockdown has had a detrimental impact on the care home residents and staff. There was a trend amongst all care homes involved in the survey that the most important way to offer support was spending time with residents; this was especially vital for residents who might not spend a lot of time out of their room.

Other comments raised were:

- Residents having checks and tests for COVID-19 virus following government guidelines
- The use of technology to keep connected with others such as iPads and Skype calls
- Staff have done all they can to keep their spirits high and boost morale, while keeping them safe
- A person-centred approach means we know our residents and flag up if any issues arise
- Many residents have been living in the care home for a long time so staff have got to know them well so were able to keep an eye on any changes that might suggest they needed more support

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The term ‘person-centred’ was mentioned several times by care home staff which shows it is vital to have an understanding of the needs of each resident and cater any support to them and allow them to be at the heart of every decision

What were the challenges during lockdown?

Some comments we received:

- End of life care.
- Limited family visits.
- Doing everything to protect the residents.
- Support, protecting staff in the workplace, following government guidance, it is hard.
- We could not get enough groceries online so had to visit supermarkets to get what we needed.
- Closing down of day centres
- Lack of PPE at the start of lockdown left us feeling vulnerable

Four out of the seven care homes involved mentioned issues with grocery deliveries, one staff member mentioned having to go out to three different supermarkets and queuing to get the items they needed. There was also an issue with getting online delivery slots. Since March, Supermarkets have increased the amount of delivery slots to combat this (*Whitbread, 2020*)

Although the issue of lack of PPE has since been addressed, one care home stated:

“Community involvement has soared. We were given free masks and kit bags made by the community”

Has there been any new learning in the process? And if so, what has this been?

TRAINING - This process has highlighted training needs. Most training has been moved online which has worked really well and one care home stated they will continue with online training in future as it worked so well and more people could attend

MORE STAFF - All care homes highlighted the importance of spending time with the residents and one care home has already decided to recruit an extra Activity Co-ordinator to keep residents entertained and supported

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INFECTION CONTROL - Three care homes mentioned how well their infection control worked. Out of the seven care homes involved, only one care home had a suspected case of COVID-19 while the other six care homes have had no cases

EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICIES -

“This has highlighted the importance of our policies and shown how effective they are. We’ve had no COVID cases”

KEEPING PEOPLE INFORMED - Communication is of utmost importance to make sure families are kept informed of how their loved one is doing. Two care homes stated that they had also organised a telephone booking system so that they could ensure the family could contact the care home at a specific time without the worry of the phones being engaged

What will we do next?

This report will be shared amongst the care homes that took part in the survey, as well as shared with our stakeholders within Swindon.

We will continue to ask people to share their experiences of health and social care in our [#BecauseWeAllCare campaign](#).

References

Jones, 2020 (Covid: Care home visits advice impractical, say charities) BBC News Online
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-54815587>

Whitbread, 2020 (Which Supermarkets Have Delivery Slots Available?) The Independent Online
<https://www.independent.co.uk/extras/indybest/food-drink/supermarket-delivery-slots-uk-tesco-asda-b1527600.html>