



Nursing Homes Ireland

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**Mr Phelim Quinn,  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Health Information and Quality Authority,  
George's Court,  
George's Lane,  
Dublin 7,  
D07 E98Y**

**12<sup>th</sup> May 2020**

Dear Phelim,

I refer to our telephone conversation yesterday regarding article in Irish Times 11<sup>th</sup> May, *'If they don't die of Covid, they will die of loneliness'*, which featured an interview with Deputy Chief Inspector.

We are extremely disappointed and offended by comments in the article stating "prison-type visiting scenarios" are among the solutions being considered to reopen homes to visitors.

For a representative of HIQA to associate nursing home care with "prison" is deeply offensive, upsetting and irresponsible. The nursing home is the resident's home and the comments present nursing home care in a most negative and derogatory light.

Nursing homes and their staff are committed to providing residents with the best possible care and are now seeking to achieve such under the most challenging circumstances. Covid-19 has brought a lot of upset, fear and anxiety for residents, their families, and staff in our nursing homes.

Compounding the upset, the Deputy Chief Inspector referred to "blind panic and pandemonium" in nursing homes during Covid-19. The global pandemic is presenting an unprecedented challenge across our health services and you will be well aware the nursing home sector has experienced the worst of the pandemic in Ireland. During this, staff across our nursing homes – HSE, private and voluntary – have maintained their professionalism, composure and undertaken huge commitment and personal sacrifices to continue providing care to residents in the most difficult of circumstances. In the absence of required supports from the State, their competence, professionalism and tremendous

dedication to residents in their care has been to the fore. The comments are not representative and serve to heighten angst and worry of people in our nursing homes and those missing visiting residents.

The article also presented to readers that there was no relationship between our sector and the HSE. This is not reflective of the realities of the ongoing constructive, sometimes challenging, engagement between both organisations that was undertaken in advance of Covid-19 and continues on a daily basis. This engagement was undertaken at an early stage to support nursing homes through the provision of advice and guidance to support them in preparing for and managing the disease and it continues. We also acknowledge the fact that HIQA has escalated the sectors concerns to the authorities as appropriate.

The article also incorrectly stated that “the number of deaths as a proportion of the overall residents is very high”. The reality is that the vast majority, in excess of 85% of nursing home residents Covid positive, thankfully make a full recovery.

As per our conversation, I can confirm that we in NHI have begun discussions in respect of easing visitor restrictions. The practice of restricting and subsequently suspending visits was undertaken by NHI Members to protect residents from the highly contagious disease. We are committed to supporting our Members in easing visitor restrictions when the appropriate opportunity / opportunities present and to the fore will be the requirement to protect the health of residents and the staff caring for them and to support their wellbeing.

I have attached draft NHI discussion document on easing visitor restrictions and look forward to engaging with the Authority on this.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the sender.

**Tadhg Daly**  
**Chief Executive Officer**



## **Discussion Document**

### **Easing Visitor Restrictions in Nursing Homes – Covid19**

On Friday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2020 Visitor Restrictions were announced by Nursing Homes Ireland for the protection of nursing home residents and staff. These included no non-essential visiting, children or groups allowed, with special provision for end of life care.

NHI also asked that all visitors contact prior to attending. Visitors should only seek to attend in urgent circumstances and the management reserve the right to impose full restrictions where necessary.

The leadership by NHI was critical in early March and we now need to consider an approach on easing visitor restrictions.

As we move through this crisis and note that this virus may be with us until at least early 2021, NHI must discuss a plan on when and how these visitor restrictions will be eased and what this will look like for residents, families and our members. We must be cognisant of both the health and wellbeing of the residents and staff but also that many families have not seen their loved ones for a number of weeks now.

Nursing Homes Ireland is monitoring the evolving situation on an ongoing basis and is in continuous contact with Minister for Health, Department of Health, HSE and all relevant health authorities on the guidance.

We are aware that our nursing homes will need clear guidance on when and how to ease/lift these restrictions.

Below listed some potential items for discussion on how members could plan for a policy and procedure on easing visitor restrictions. NHI propose engagement with Department of Health, NPHE, HSE Public Health, HSE Operations, HIQA and other key stakeholders.

These DRAFT measures are all based on the premise that NPHE recommend that visitor restrictions are eased together with a more effective, timely process of testing (24 hour results) and contact tracing system. A consistent daily delivery of fast test results is crucial if the information is to be acted upon and the positive cases isolated.

1. Nursing Homes may be based on a scale rating with a 5 level scale with 5 being total lock down as we are today and 1 being open door visiting as it was prior to March 6th. The draft measures here could relate to the level 4 measures and any lifting on these measures would relate to level 3 and then so on.
2. Visitor Restrictions should remain in place in all centres that are Covid19 Positive for a period of time that will be agreed with Public Health.
3. Visits should be for a maximum duration of (15/30) minutes to allow as many visitors as possible access. This should be reviewed on a weekly basis.
4. Covid19 Status of each nursing home needs to be verified (NAS testing and results) prior to easing/ lifting visitor restrictions.
5. Visits should be booked to commence on the hour or the half hour, allowing the extra time for donning and doffing of PPE.
6. It will be necessary to get confirmation that visits may take place from insurance companies for Public Liability and Employers Liability perspective.
7. An appropriate risk assessment should be done when people arrive and the staff member greets them at the door.
8. Screening must be completed for all visitors prior to entry. Visitors will have their temperature checked upon arrival at the centre and must inform the nursing home staff if they feel unwell or have had sudden onset of any of the following, respiratory illness / cough / shortness of breath / fever.
9. Visitors must inform the nursing home staff where they have been in close contact with a suspected / probable COVID-19 case within the last 14 days.
10. Visitors must wash their hands upon entering and leaving the nursing home.
11. Social distancing will need to be maintained at all times.
12. No children under the age of 18 are allowed to visit.
13. No refreshments will be made available to visitors during the course of the visit.
14. Any visitors showing up in an unplanned manner will be refused admission.
15. Strict control of overall number of visits to the nursing home each day, with prearranged appointment times. Visitors that are late will not be admitted; visitors that are early will need to wait until their pre-booked time.

16. Consider ease of access and egress when deciding on the policy – access should be only through the front door/main entrance.
17. Visitors will need to be escorted from the entrance(s) to the residents rooms and back again when they are leaving.
18. Visits will be facilitated where appropriate based on size and access outside in the nursing home garden or in the nursing home patio. Social distancing requirements must be adhered to.
19. Sign in books will be completed by Reception staff upon the arrival of the visitor.
20. Visitors will not be able to use the nursing homes restrooms. If visitors do need to use restrooms they should use the en-suite bathroom facilities during their visits due to potential for infection.
21. Visits should not take place in multi-occupancy rooms.
22. No more than one visitor per resident per visit is strictly observed and that it is the same person each time i.e. the nominated representative
23. Restrict visits to 1 per week per resident in the first two weeks scaling it up very gradually after that.
24. PPE for visitors needs to be supplied by nursing home, they will need at a minimum a plastic apron, a surgical mask & gloves.
25. Time of visits – Visits should only take place during the day when the main cohort of staff are on duty and away from meal times. Suggest 10.00 – 12.00 & 14.00-16.30.
26. Visits will be fully restricted again if in the opinion of the Person In Charge/Registered Provider it is prudent to do so.
27. Visitors found flouting the rules will be asked to leave and will not/ may not be allowed back into the nursing home.
28. Separate arrangements will be in place for those who are visiting residents at end of life.

**Policy regularly reviewed.**

**28<sup>th</sup> April 2020**