



Thursday 21st May, 2020

Dear friends,

This letter follows my letter of 12th May, 2020 and is intended to keep you informed about our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This letter is being circulated to our workforce including our volunteers, our residents and their families and representatives, our self-care residents, company members, general practices and the wider community.

Introducing the Harbison Visitor Pod at Burradoo

As part of our plan to increase the options available for safe visits at Harbison, we have constructed our first Visitor Pod at the main entrance to Harbison Burradoo. We expect to open the pod to visitors from Monday 25 May 2020.

The pod is a 3m x 5m temporary structure designed to allow longer visits than we can currently accommodate inside our buildings. The inside of the air-conditioned pod is divided by a partition to keep residents safely isolated from their visitors.

Initially we will allow 45-minute visits inside the pod, limited to 2 visitors and 1 resident per visit. After a trial period with limited visits, the pod will be available by appointment from 8am to 5pm weekdays and 10am to 4pm on weekends. The same sign-in and screening process applies to pod visits as other in-person visits. For a copy of our current visitor policy please visit our website www.harbison.org.au or refer to my last letter.

We have decided to trial the pod for 6 months and welcome feedback about this option. The pod will not suit every resident, so our other options, including virtual options, remain in place. Please note, the pod is available to anyone who is mobile enough to use it, not just residents who meet the priority criteria for visits.

We are committed to increasing safe visit options to maintain quality of life for our residents. We are regularly reviewing our risk assessments to ensure the restrictions we have in place are proportionate to the risks. Our goal is to normalise life for residents and their families as much as possible.

We will consider a similar option for Moss Vale if the concept proves successful.

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Influenza vaccinations

I have been questioned by several people about why it is important for all of us to have a current influenza vaccination. They point out that the vaccination cannot prevent COVID-19 infection. It is a good question.

The answer is to reduce the risk of getting the seasonal 'flu and COVID-19 at the same time, and to reduce the burden on the hospital system. This is so important it has been made a strict condition of entry to any residential aged care in NSW.

Influenza kills hundreds of people in a normal year in Australia. In 2017 more than 1,200 Australians died from the 'flu and thousands more were hospitalised. Compare that to the 100 coronavirus deaths so far in 2020.

Harbison is proud of its infection prevention and control record. We introduced mandatory annual influenza vaccinations for our workforce three years ago, before it was required by regulators.

Both the 'flu and COVID-19 can cause acute respiratory problems, including pneumonia. It could be extremely dangerous to get both at the same time, especially if you are older, very young, pregnant, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or have an underlying condition such as heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease or asthma.

The same scarce hospital resources required for COVID-19 may be required for influenza treatment. If we have a major outbreak of 'flu in the community, we may not be able to respond to a simultaneous coronavirus outbreak due to lack of hospital resources. As you know, personal protective equipment, ventilators, oxygen, anaesthesia for intubation, and trained respiratory experts are all in short supply.

We do not have a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19, but we do have effective vaccines available for influenza. By making them mandatory for everyone who can safely have them we reduce the danger to individuals and reduce the risk that our hospital system will not be able to cope if the coronavirus curve gets away from us. It is another example of how we all have a role to play in managing this deadly virus.

Our plans to prevent and manage coronavirus are based on our plans to prevent and manage influenza. They are simply scaled up in proportion to the risk that COVID-19 will result in death. They are designed to reduce the likelihood and severity of both types of outbreak.

Café Charlotte

Café Charlotte at Burradoo has been serving takeaway only since visitor restrictions began. I am pleased to announce that it will reopen for seated patrons from Monday 25 May 2020, in line with the easing of restrictions on cafes in the community.

The number of seats will be limited to 5 initially, and social distancing requirements must be observed. Residents should not spend more than 2 hours in the café each day.

The café will continue to operate on a cashless basis. Residents may charge their purchases to their account if they do not wish to pay by card.

Russell and Lisa have done a great job keeping the café going through this difficult period. We will reassess the risks after a short while, and if we decide it is safe to do so we will expand the seating capacity in accordance with regulations.

While Moss Vale is currently without a café or kiosk work is progressing well on the new kitchen. Once the new kitchen is delivered in late June work will begin on building a new adjacent dining room and café. Please be patient as we believe the new facilities will be well worth the wait.

We are developing a cashless system for kiosk purchases too, because cash is a major infection transmission pathway. More information will be provided soon, and we apologise for any inconvenience in the meantime.

Colour coding areas in our homes

In the event of a COVID-19 outbreak residents will be confined to their rooms as much as possible to slow the spread of infection. Members of the workforce who have had direct or indirect contact with infected residents will be immediately tested and sent into self-isolation, which means they will not be available to work for at least 14 days. This will put a strain on our ability to maintain normal care and services.

To minimise the impact and maximise the number of staff available we have begun reducing the movement of the workforce around our buildings. Staff are being assigned to dedicated areas wherever possible. To assist this process, staff will begin wearing colour coded vests that indicate which area they belong to. They will minimise their interaction with staff from other areas and start using different exits and break spaces.

We strongly encourage residents to minimise their movements into other resident areas to maintain the integrity of this precaution. For example, if your carers wear pink and you find yourself in an area where the staff are wearing a different colour, consider whether you need to be there.

While on the subject of colour you may also notice staff wearing a sticker on their name badges. This indicates that they have had their temperature tested and passed our other screening processes at the start of their shift. The colour of the sticker changes each day. If you see a member of the workforce without a sticker, please bring it to the attention of an RN or manager. A similar process is in place for visitors, who wear a colour coded wrist band.

The bus is back

Under current public health orders social outings are still prohibited for residents, but we have introduced short scenic bus tours for residents who would benefit from an outing and consent to the risks involved.

Feedback from the first trips this week has been very positive. As usual, there is a process involved to ensure we meet the legal requirements, but we have tried to keep it as simple as possible. If you would like to know more about the bus trips please contact your Personal Care Manager (Rabin or Bec).

Respecting our staff

We are grateful for the supportive feedback we have generally received as we adapt to these challenging times.

Most visitors have been very patient with the new procedures, but there have been some ongoing instances of abusive behaviour directed towards staff. I understand you might feel frustration, anxiety, and disappointment when we cannot accommodate a request, but I will not tolerate abusive behaviour.

If you want to express your feelings, please direct them to me. I am accountable for the precautions we have put in place. I know they frustrate everyone, including our workforce, and in some cases have caused hurts for which I will always be sorry.

The escalated infection prevention and control protocols make a challenging job even more difficult for our people, especially on a sustained basis. Our people are working hard and doing their best with limited resources. They have their own pandemic stories to tell in their personal lives. We are all in this together. Please respect them as they do their best to help you.

Volunteer week

We usually host a lunch to mark the annual volunteer week. Obviously, that is not possible this year.

Harbison was founded by volunteers more than 60 years ago. In difficult times – drought, bushfire, pandemic, royal commission – we need the support of our volunteers more than ever.

Many of our volunteers are older themselves, which means they are not able to attend Harbison safely now. We must recruit new, younger volunteers who can carry forward the wonderful Harbison tradition.

Jill Wall has accepted the challenge of reshaping our volunteer program for a post-covid world. I am grateful for her energy, enthusiasm, and fresh ideas. Jill sits on our Resident Advisory Committee with other volunteers and residents, to ensure our volunteers understand the needs and preferences of our residents and have a voice in our planning processes.

Some volunteers work through formal structures like our Art Committee, while others blend in with the other members of our workforce to provide care to our residents. Special mention to Glennis Noble, whose husband Jim is a resident of Burradoo, who has been a pivotal volunteer member of our COVID-19 care support team recently.

Our Resident Advisory Committee - composed of volunteers including residents - is in its second year and continues to play a very effective role. Thank you to Carolyn, Rhonda, Jill, Glennis, Greg, Ron, and Harold (and vale Des).

We have gardening volunteers, volunteers who help with meals, musical volunteers, fund-raising volunteers, student volunteers, artistic volunteers, spiritual volunteers, volunteer pets... Even our Board of Directors are volunteers, who give up more than 100 hours each year to ensure Harbison is properly governed and on the right strategic path.

Thank you to all our volunteers. We would not be Harbison without you. We need more of you, more than ever.

Thank you for reading this letter. I continue to be proud of the Harbison community. Life at Harbison goes on. I look forward to seeing many of you using the Harbison Visitor Pod. Please continue to provide us with feedback. Please continue to play your part with hand washing, cough etiquette, social distancing, and testing at the merest sign or symptom. Look after yourself so you can look after others. Stay safe!

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Cochran', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Cochran

Chief Executive Officer