

Monday 17th August, 2020

Dear friends,

I has been almost three weeks since I last wrote to you on 29th July 2020. This letter provides you with updated information about our response to COVID-19. It is being distributed to residents and their representatives, our workforce including our volunteers, local general practices, our company members, and the wider Southern Highlands community.

The Harbison Visitor Pod is reopening at Burradoo

On 15th July 2020 NSW Health issued a temporary directive closing aged care services in South Western Sydney to visitors, with strictly limited exceptions for e.g. end of life visits.

On 7th August 2020, this directive was lifted for Wingecarribee and Wollondilly and replaced with a directive prohibiting visitors who have been in prescribed suburbs during the past 14 days. The latest list dated 10th August 2020 includes 21 suburbs.

In practice, we have no safe and practicable way of screening potential visitors against the list of suburbs. We note that there is evidence of continuing community transmission, and a recent case alert includes a venue in Bowral. Therefore, we will await further advice from NSW Health before we decide to resume our visitor program.

However, we believe the Visitor Pod at Burradoo is a safe option in current circumstances, and since last week have been prioritising inviting families and friends of high needs residents to use it for a visit. I am pleased to announce that the Pod is also available for online bookings at <https://harbison.org.au/visit-harbison/>

Because the capacity to host visits is extremely limited, we continue to recommend virtual visits, which can also be booked online. I am sorry we cannot safely offer more options at this time.

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C2BME & Swinburne Telehealth Counselling and Support Service

We are mindful of the mental health effects of COVID-19 on our residents, their families, and our workforce. We have adopted a multi-faceted strategy to provide additional support during the pandemic.

Our Wellbeing Group has expanded and now consists of psychologists, experienced pastoral carers, and a diversional therapist. They support our care teams to ensure every resident receives the best possible support, promoting well-being instead of ill-being.

Our in-house capability is augmented by a memorandum of understanding between Harbison and the Parramatta Mission, who have funding to provide mental health first aid in aged care. The program is called *Continuing to be Me* (C2BME) and more information is available at <https://www.parramattamission.org.au/mh-service/c2bme/>

We will liaise with the Mission on behalf of residents who may benefit from C2BME, but if you would like to know more, please ask.

Swinburne University of Technology's Wellbeing Clinic for Older Adults provides another option. Residents, and family and friends of residents, are eligible to receive this free service. To learn more or to organise a referral simply visit <https://www.swinburne.edu.au/lss/psychology/pc/older-adults/telehealth-counselling.html>

Harbison may refer a resident to the Swinburne service, but we encourage you to complete the online referral form if you would like emotional support in caring for a resident. We are happy to help if you would like assistance with the process.

The Wellbeing Clinic has been running for more than 10 years, and offers phone and video counselling sessions with provisionally registered psychologists, social work interns, and counselling postgraduates. Sessions are supervised by experienced practitioners.

Our employees and volunteers have access to our employee assistance program, *Access EAP*.

COVID-19 is unprecedented, but there are things we can do together to minimise the impact on the wellbeing of residents and those who care for them. Harbison believes that care happens in the context of relationships – between residents and staff, residents and their friends and families, residents and other residents, staff and families, staff and staff etc.

Everyone in the relationship matters. The experience of one impacts the experience of the others. We are committed to doing what we can to ensure that everyone in the relationship has an opportunity to get the support they need, so we can all come through the pandemic together. I hope you consider reaching out for help if you are feeling anxious.

2020 Road Worlds for Seniors

The Motiview 2020 Road Worlds for Seniors will commence on Monday 7th September 2020. Since beginning in Norway in 2017 the competition has grown to 4,333 cyclists from seven countries, who collectively completed 108,412km in 25 days in September 2019. In their first attempt, the Harbison 2019 Motiview team placed 78th out of 194 teams!

The Road Worlds aims to become the largest sporting event in the world in terms of numbers of participants.

This year Harbison hopes to enter another team. While Motiview is not scheduled to launch at Moss Vale until after the competition, we hope our Moss Vale residents will have an opportunity to cheer on their neighbours by video link.

Rabin Joshi, Personal Care Manager at Burradoo, will be leading the support team for this year's race. The goal is simply to cycle as many kilometres as possible before the competition ends. Prizes will be given for participation, 2019 records will be tested, and in the end the 2020 male and female champions will be crowned. There are also awards for best team and best support team.

If you would like to enter the competition, please contact Rabin Joshi. If you would like to volunteer on the support team or sponsor riders please contact Jill Wall, our Volunteer Coordinator.

Motiview is a great program, and accessible to almost anyone. Harbison was the first aged care provider in Australia to introduce Motiview. For more information visit <https://motitech.co.uk/motiview> (or better still volunteer and see the program in action).

I wish our 2020 competitors the best of luck, in what may be one of the only international sporting competitions of 2020!

Vitamin D3 supplementation

We recommend discussing vitamin D3 supplementation with your GP.

While it is still under investigation in the context of COVID-19, Professor Peter Ebeling of Monash University has recently¹ advocated a daily supplement of 3000 IU of vitamin D3 for aged care residents.

Research published in 2017 demonstrated that regular vitamin D supplementation reduced the risk of respiratory tract infections by approximately 20% and was even more protective in people with vitamin D deficiency.

¹ Ebeling P, "Taking Vitamin D to prevent COVID-19", Health Ed Clinical Article, 5th August 2020, https://www.healthed.com.au/clinical_articles/taking-vit-d-to-prevent-covid-19/

Vitamin D3 is a safe supplement with health advantages beyond acute respiratory infection. If you would like to know more, please ask your GP.

What to expect if there is an outbreak of COVID-19

If a single resident, visitor, or member of our workforce tests positive for COVID-19, Harbison will declare an outbreak. In the case of an infected resident, we will contact their nominated representative by phone within 30 minutes. It is important you provide us with updated contact information whenever it changes.

Harbison has an Outbreak Management Plan. We conduct regular drills to ensure staff and residents have opportunities to practice the plan. The goal of the plan is to quickly contain spread of an infection and ensure that unwell residents receive the treatment they require.

Within one hour of declaring an outbreak we will use our emergency SMS system to notify everyone. If you have not provided us with a mobile number, you will not receive that message.

Staff will change to using PPE² for contact and droplet precautions until the outbreak is over. We anticipate that many staff will be unable to work on site in an outbreak, either because they are directed to isolate or because they are in a high-risk category for COVID-19.

As part of our plan we have strike teams in place, who have agreed to work 12 hour shifts to provide care to any infected residents who do not transfer to hospital. We are also planning for staff in isolation to work remotely to ensure they can continue to provide support to residents and their colleagues. To that end our staff are rapidly developing their video conferencing skills using our Microsoft Teams system.

The government will provide experts to work with our Outbreak Management Team to ensure Harbison receives support from the public health unit. The government may also provide temporary workers to supplement our own workforce, if necessary. The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission will provide oversight of our response to the outbreak.

During an outbreak, residents must be confined to their rooms whether they are infected or not. We anticipate that residents who cannot be isolated may be transferred to hospital. We expect that any decision to transfer a resident to hospital will be made by the public health unit or physicians at the hospital. In our view transferring infected residents to hospital is sound policy.

² Personal protective equipment

During an outbreak, the focus will be containing the infection and providing supportive care to unwell residents. Our services team will provide cleaning, laundry, and meal services but there will be no activities. We will provide as much support as possible to residents during the lockdown to protect their mental health. Everyone will cope differently depending on their personality, experience, and ability.

We will contact the nominated representative of each resident at least once a day to provide them with a health update. We ask that you do not call seeking information because every available person will be working on urgent responsibilities and we will not be able to forward calls. We will also contact nominated representatives immediately if there is any change in a resident's condition. In end of life cases we will use plain, difficult language to ensure the situation is clearly understood.

An outbreak will usually last weeks. The early stage of the outbreak is expected to be the most challenging. We will continue to work on our preparations for the foreseeable future. There are no guarantees in an outbreak, but we assure you that we will respond decisively and quickly and spare no effort.

We will continue to practice our plans and escalate our readiness status whenever we detect any signs or symptoms that could be caused by COVID-19. We have a good track record managing outbreaks of influenza and gastroenteritis, but COVID-19 is beyond our experience. We all understand the impact an outbreak will have on residents, families, and staff which is why we are putting so much effort into prevention.

If you have any questions about our plans, please feel free to contact me.

Relatives & representatives meeting by video 19th August 2020 at 6pm

We are hosting a virtual meeting for families and friends. An invitation was circulated several weeks ago, but if you have not responded it is not too late to register.

The meeting is an opportunity to provide us with feedback and ask questions. The focus will be the pandemic, but any topic is welcome. If you would like us to take any questions on notice, please contact us before the meeting.

Until next time...

There is no going back. We must adapt to living with the virus. I continue to be cautiously optimistic about vaccines and treatments. But until we have a vaccine, we must take a cooperative civic approach based on social distancing, cough etiquette, hand hygiene, early detection, wearing masks at work and in public, and using the COVIDSafe app.

Thank you to everyone who sent messages to our staff for *Aged Care Employee Day*. I commend our workforce for their ongoing commitment to the safety, comfort, and security of our residents. I am pleased to confirm that the Workforce Retention Bonus was paid to

eligible employees on Friday 7th August 2020. I am sorry a small number of employees were ineligible under the government rules.

NSW is on high alert because of community transmission. Mistakes have been made, but lessons are constantly being learned. An army of smart, dedicated people is fighting around the clock to thwart the virus. Aged care deserves more practical support from governments at all levels. Feel free to write to your local members on our behalf.

Thank you for reading this letter. I hope you find it useful and reassuring. I will write again as soon as anything changes. Meanwhile, 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