

Erosh briefing ...

March 2020



Supporting Older People and Staff through Coronavirus (Covid-19)

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erosh is a membership organisation for professionals in the sheltered & retirement housing sector. We provide news, commentary and good practice to help you respond to current and future challenges and opportunities; to enhance individual and organisational performance; to help you comply with national standards; and ultimately to improve the quality of housing and support services for older people.

For information about erosh and to join please click [here](#).

1. Introduction

It is an uncertain and worrying time for everyone including sheltered and retirement housing providers supporting older people and their own staff. The situation is continuously and frequently changing, as is the advice and guidance from Government which is updated daily (available [here](#)).

We have not provided advice and guidance on Coronavirus (Covid-19) itself nor on specific action individuals should take. Please consult specialist and government sites for up to date information (see [Section 4](#)). The aim of this briefing is to focus on some particular considerations for sheltered and retirement housing providers, share approaches from erosh members, and to highlight where we may be able to help in some way.

2. Who is at risk

People over 70 have been identified as being particularly at risk as well as anyone who:

- Has had an organ transplant and are taking immunosuppressant medicine
- Is having chemotherapy or radiotherapy
- Has blood or bone marrow cancer, such as leukemia
- Has a severe chest condition, such as cystic fibrosis or severe asthma
- Has any other serious health condition

3. What erosh members are doing

Here are some examples of what erosh members are doing to support residents and staff:

Communication

- Writing to sheltered and retirement housing residents (and families and carers) explaining:
 - What Coronavirus (Covid-19) is and its symptoms
 - How people can reduce the risk of getting Coronavirus
 - Advice on behaviour e.g. going out, meeting with other people, receiving visitors etc.
 - What to do if they experience symptoms
 - What will happen if any resident or staff is confirmed as having Coronavirus
 - What the organisation is doing to protect people e.g. additional cleaning, disinfecting etc
 - Reminding people about their existing Infection Control procedures and guidance
- Asking residents who feel unwell or are self-isolating to contact them immediately so services can be tailored accordingly.
- Communicating to residents and family/carers service changes e.g. only essential home/scheme visits, staff availability/working arrangements, emergency repairs only etc.; as well as any known changes to care support and what residents should do if they feel their safety is being compromised.
- Signposting residents to support for shopping etc, and helping them to register for on-line services.

- Updating residents on any changes to the situation, government advice, and the organisation's approach.
- Where possible, encouraging and supporting residents to access and register for services online e.g. rent account enquiries, booking/amending repairs, paying rent etc.
- Providing Coronavirus information on website home pages and/or a dedicated webpage
- Putting up notices or posters in reception areas reminding residents and visitors about government advice as well as washing hands, discouraging anyone ill from visiting etc.
- Providing guidance about whether or not relatives and friends can visit, non-essential visitor policy etc.

Repairs and maintenance services

- Carrying out only essential or emergency maintenance and repairs; and communicating this to residents.
- Advising residents that there will be a delay in carrying out non-urgent repairs.
- Calling residents in advance and asking again on arrival if anyone in the property has been affected by Coronavirus; if they have, leaving and not carrying out the repair.
- If it is safe to enter a property, advising contractors to wash hands on entering, go straight to area needing repair, and leave.

Staff working arrangements

- Staff working from home (see our new briefing on *Supporting Home Workers*) with a skeleton staff (on a rota basis) focusing on key priorities e.g. building checks, dealing with emergencies, welfare concerns etc.
- Communicating changes to working arrangements to residents and reassuring them of service continuity.
- Ensuring staff are aware of Coronavirus symptoms and what to do if they identify them in themselves or amongst residents.
- Contacting residents by phone rather than in person.
- More frequent staff meetings either on-site or virtually.
- Providing guidance for staff similar to guidance provided to residents
- Requesting up to date medical history from residents (and staff) so those at high risk can be targeted.
- Cancelling non-essential meetings or carry out virtual meetings including one to one and team meetings.
- Focusing on continuous cleaning of areas where Coronavirus is more likely e.g. door handles/rails/panels, toilets, laundry rooms/machines, communal room chairs, staff offices, key boards, phones etc) rather than on low risk areas e.g. dust on high ledges etc.
- Closing communal lounges/advising residents against using them; and if residents do continue to use them, reminding them about good hygiene practices.
- Cancelling all bookings and use of guest rooms as well as cancelling all outings and scheme-based events.

Encouraging mutual support

- Facilitating help from friends and relatives with shopping, collecting prescriptions etc.
- Promoting local online or telephone support groups.

- Encouraging communication between residents and neighbours as well as external friends and relatives e.g. email, phone calls, skype etc.
- Continuing to involve residents (and a wider range of residents especially those who are or at risk of being lonely or social isolated) in particular engagement opportunities e.g. armchair/reader panels, etc.
- Providing information about local meal delivery services including pubs/restaurants who do not normally.
- Providing information about how to maintain health and well-being.
- Facilitating arrangements, especially for those self-isolating, to access food and essential supplies.

Loneliness and social isolation

As we are aware, older people are or are at risk of being lonely and/or socially isolated. For some, the Coronavirus situation will make this worse especially if people are being advised to minimise social contact or avoid it altogether, including from friends and relatives, whether or not they have the virus. A lack of clear information or changing information as well as misinformation can cause confusion and anxiety in all of us but for some older people, especially on their own, these feelings can be heightened significantly.

It is always essential therefore that sheltered and retirement housing providers consider residents who are or are at risk of being lonely and socially isolated. Our guide on [Addressing Loneliness and Social Isolation in Older people](#) contains good practice advice about what organisations and individual staff members can do. Of course not all of this will be feasible in the current situation, but some particular measures may be useful e.g.

- Developing a register of those at increased risk of Coronavirus.
- Identifying any new opportunities for virtual social interaction.
- Making sure residents have information about local support groups, telephone helplines etc. including any new groups set up as a result of the Coronavirus situation.
- Making sure handbooks and directories are up to date and including any new information relating to the Coronavirus situation e.g. volunteer groups helping with shopping, picking up prescriptions, etc.
- Signposting people to self help groups, counsellors etc.
- For those who are able to/do use IT – providing online or telephone support and signposting to other free sources of support e.g. e.g. [Silver Surfers](#) or [AbilityNet](#).
- We have heard reports of increased scamming activity, so providing advice without scaring people e.g. from the [Financial Conduct Authority](#), [Which?](#), [AgeUK](#), [Independent Age](#), or [Friends Against Scams](#).

Financial support

- Some residents may still be working and may experience financial difficulties if they are unable to work because of Coronavirus so signposting to financial advice and support services

Other

- Some members are using empty accommodation for supported housing clients who have to self-isolate.

4. Where to find further information

Click on the following links.

- Age UK – [Coronavirus information](#)
- BBC - [Coronavirus pandemic](#)
- NHS - [information about Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- Public Health England - [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - what you need to know](#)
- 111 Online - [Coronavirus guidance](#)

5. Your views and experience

As always, we are keen to collect your views and experiences. If you have anything to share with other erosh members, please email Rebecca Mollart, ceo@erosh.co.uk or call 07803 176957.