

# Erosh briefing ...

Updated April 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. The challenges

There are a number of key challenges and issues erosh members have reported to us. In particular:

- **Residents accessing local support services** – not all residents, especially those without access to IT, are plugged into local sources of support for shopping etc. Members have reported that sometimes staff are so keen to help they are shopping for residents rather than helping residents to sign up to local sources of support. Organisations are reminding staff that shopping for residents is only a last resort, and about professional boundaries and the importance of promoting independence.
- **Changing to home working** - especially staff not used to using IT in this way. In addition, some organisations were not set up for home or agile working or not set up as well as they thought they were. Issues include poor internet connections and mobile phone signals, oversubscribed conferencing facilities etc.
- **Service Manager's role** - knowing what's happening 'out there' and feeling confident that daily calls etc are taking place. Some service managers feel less in control even though in reality it may not be any different from the 'normal' working situation. Performance management where staff are dispersed and/or home or flexibly working is more challenging in some ways especially where there has been no time for training. Our guide on *Supporting Home Workers* highlights some of the key issues and strategies for managing and supporting those who are now working from home.
- **Loneliness and social isolation and anxiety** - older people are or are at risk of being lonely and/or socially isolated and for some, the current situation including social distancing measures has made this worse and created anxiety and depression.

## 4. What erosh members are doing

Here are some examples of what members are doing to support residents and staff (in alphabetical order):

### Cleaning

- Focusing on continuous cleaning of areas where Covid-19 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.
- Providing hand sanitisers and wipes at scheme entrances and exits, monitored by staff and re-ordered weekly.

### Communal facilities

- Closing communal lounges and cancelling all scheme based meetings and events (and outings). Some very small organisations e.g. almshouses where the number of residents is small enough to be considered a 'household', have kept the communal lounge open but with strict protocols e.g. particular times of day and with strict hygiene and social distancing measures.
- Laundry facilities – some organisations have closed these. Others are restricting access to particular slots in the day and with only one resident at any one time, and then they are cleaned by staff.

### Communication

- Writing to sheltered and retirement housing residents (and families and carers) explaining:
  - What Coronavirus (Covid-19), its symptoms, and how people can reduce the risk of getting it
  - Advice on behaviour e.g. social distancing, going out (and what will happen if they do go out e.g. isolation for a minimum period), 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 clearing, disinfecting etc
  - Reminding people about their existing Infection Control procedures and guidance
- After initial guidance letters, regularly sending out reinforcing letters (especially social distancing measures) with updates on government advice and the organisation's approach.
- Putting up notices everywhere in schemes, in newsletters and magazines, and on website and Facebook pages reinforcing social distancing, hand washing etc as well as visitor policy.
- Requesting up to date medical history from residents (and staff) so those at high risk can be targeted.
- Asking residents who feel unwell or are self-isolating to contact them immediately so services can be tailored accordingly; and proactively keeping in touch with them until they have recovered.
- Communicating to residents and family/carers any changes to service delivery and working arrangements (with reassurance about service continuity) e.g. only essential home/scheme visits, staff availability, emergency only repairs etc.; as well as any known changes to care support and what residents should do if they feel their safety is being compromised.

- Daily calls to residents to maintain contact, and to provide reassurance.
- Still encouraging residents to contact their scheme manager by phone, avoiding face-to-face contact.
- Providing Coronavirus information on website home pages and/or a dedicated webpage

### **Guest rooms**

- Cancelling all bookings until further notice, even if they have been paid for.

### **Health and well-being of residents**

- Encouraging residents to stay active physically and alert mentally
- Encouraging residents to walk and sit outside, observing social distancing guidelines. In some organisations staff are monitoring this, and encouraging people to move on or to keep the recommended distance.
- Providing leaflets/handouts on chair-based and other exercises that can be safely practised indoors.
- Providing information leaflets on health eating.
- Running a small outside exercise group observing social distancing measures.
- Having staff bring dogs to work to encourage residents to walk them round the grounds.
- Some organisations which have an on-site care homes are providing lunches and dinners for those who cannot get to local shops or where family members are for example self isolating, abroad or vulnerable. Some organisations are ordering through their own suppliers specialist food for residents and some are working with small local food businesses to deliver essentials to schemes.

### **Loneliness and social isolation**

Older people are or are at risk of being lonely and/or socially isolated. For some, the current situation will make this worse especially as people have to avoid all social contact 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.

Sheltered and retirement housing providers must therefore particularly consider the needs of 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.

- Daily calls to residents to maintain contact, provide reassurance, and minimise anxiety and depression.
- Identifying 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 current situation.
- Making sure handbooks and directories are up to date and including any new information relating to the current situation e.g. volunteer groups helping with shopping, picking up prescriptions, etc.
- Signposting people to self help groups, counsellors etc.

- Buying in jigsaws, games, and other single person activities for residents to borrow.
- Keeping 'libraries'/book stocks open (being in mind social distancing).
- 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 read 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](#).

### **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 Covid-19; if they have, leaving and not carrying out the repair.
- If safe to enter a property, advising contractors to wash hands on entering, go straight to area needing repair, and leave.

### **Resident support**

- Daily calls to residents to maintain contact, provide reassurance, and to minimise anxiety and depression; and encouraging residents to still contact their scheme manager by phone, avoiding face-to-face contact.
- Facilitating help from friends and relatives with shopping, collecting prescriptions etc.
- Signposting residents to appropriate local sources of support e.g. with shopping, prescriptions, and local meal delivery services (including increasing numbers of local pubs, takeaways and restaurants).
- Helping residents to register for online services e.g. shopping, banking, reporting repairs, paying rent etc.
- Encouraging and providing help with using social media, Skype etc to keep in touch with family and friends, engage in local religious or cultural groups and events.
- Signposting to 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.

### **Staff support**

- 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.
- Providing guidance on Covid-19 for staff similar to guidance provided to residents; ensuring they are aware of the symptoms and what to do if they identify them in themselves or amongst residents.
- Regularly asking staff if they need help or further information.

- Cancelling non-essential meetings but having frequent virtual one to one or team meetings.
- Sharing solutions by asking staff if they are developing or are aware of any local initiatives that might benefit their residents including those who are particularly vulnerable.
- Reinforcing contacts – so staff know who in their organisation to contact; especially important where staff are more isolated working from home.

### **Visitors**

- **Visitors** – discouraging all but essential visits to schemes, having deliveries dropped up in lobbies by delivery services and relatives, which staff distribute etc.

### **Other**

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

## **5. 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](#)

## **6. 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](mailto:ceo@erosh.co.uk) or call 07803 176957.