

Media Release

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Behind closed doors during lockdown

There's no doubt that COVID-19 has significantly impacted the aged care sector, and has sadly contributed to high number of deaths. But what is it like for staff who are working within an aged care residence, and how does the increased risk and responsibility impact them?

We spoke with Clinical Manager Residential Services Naomi Lewis, who is acting as a residence Commander, about what currently happens behind the closed doors of an aged care residence during lockdown. She is certain of one thing - It is a continuous learning experience.

As Commander, Naomi provides support to residences in an outbreak situation, and is a link between the home and the Government departments. She also supports on-site staff and coordinates facility-wide testing.

"Generally, the mood of residents is up and down, and residents are missing their regular interactions with their friends and family, especially while confined to their rooms," says Naomi.

"Some of the residents understand why they are in isolation whilst others need reminding. Some also question why they need to have a swab taken so frequently, so we are continually providing information, updates and reassurance. Remaining positive is important, as it allows residents to feel safe to express their concerns. Maintaining honest and open communication is key, people deserve to be, and need to be, informed."

When it comes to the day-to-day activities, most days run very much the same.

"In the morning, we have a 'huddle' with the team, which is our staff meeting, where we reinforce infection control and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) practices. We also confirm staff and resident allocations, which is so important. We also consult with our cleaning, kitchen and catering teams, to ensure we have additional touch point cleaning, as well as the use of disposable tableware. We then have an outbreak meeting, chaired by the General Manager of Residential Services.

"In the afternoon we have another team huddle, and provide an email communication to families and carers with an update on test results, and positive cases. We also have medical rounds; all residents are monitored, and confirmed cases are frequently attended to.

"In the evening and overnight we confirm the rostering for the following day. Staff on night duty are then responsible for taking the morning temperatures of all residents."

Naomi says the mood of staff is up and down, with everyone working hard to maintain a positive outlook and that their infection control practices are correct.

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“Staff understand the need to be frequently tested, however they are understandably anxious about the risks for themselves, and potentially for their families at home.

“Our team has been very appreciative of the flexibility of the organisation, and staff have been very flexible in their own working arrangements. We have some staff who work additional shifts or longer hours to ensure that the residents care needs are being met.

“Our Lifestyle and Pastoral Care teams work very hard ensuring residents are provided with activities, entertainment and support. They also facilitate connections between residents and their loved ones, plus additional daily phone calls to update families.”

Naomi says there are many challenges each day, including changes in Government advice, and multiple visits from government representatives, local hospital services and Australian Medical Assistance Teams (AUSMAT) teams.

“The frequent testing, sometimes every three days, can also be a challenge for both residents and staff. But, there are many positives too, including the amazing support that has come from everyone within the organisation – from the CEO down.

“Everyone has great concern for the welfare of the residents and staff. Our families and carers, while they are obviously anxious about the situation and concerned for their loved ones, have given us some wonderful feedback. They are appreciative of staff maintaining regular communication, via phone calls and emails, and are grateful for the opportunity to connect with their loved one through Zoom and FaceTime.

Community support has also been amazing. Our residences have received a lot of positive feedback from the Department as to how organised and prepared we have been. It is definitely a continuous learning experience.”

About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic not for profit organisation, compassion, respect and inclusion aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. We stay true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives, providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey. We provide a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.

