

Media Release

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The role of Pastoral Care during lockdown

Powerless. Distressed. Sad. Anxious. Uncertain.

We are all growing weary of restrictions, lockdowns and safety precautions. This is especially true for those who live with us across our aged care residences. Helping them to navigate their emotions and maintain their faith at this difficult time are our dedicated pastoral care practitioners.

Sr. Kate Mannes, Pastoral Care Practitioner at VMCH Bundoora Aged Care Residence says residents' feelings are swinging in multiple directions at the moment.

"All those feelings that we all have at the moment; they are feeling them too. With so many uncertainties and the added stress on staff members, they are picking up on the emotions around them. But there is the added struggle to understand the enormity of what we are trying to protect them from – even when their family tells them, they don't understand what they cannot see."

Kate says that while the frustration is normal, there are times where it can all get too much for residents, and they express their anger or they withdraw from the community. When this happens, she encourages them to just allow themselves to experience what they feel, and remind them that they are supported.

"We are all here for the residents. Here, they are not alone. They have other residents looking out for them, to chat to but they also have space to themselves if they want."

Despite the challenges, Kate says there are also times of amazing acceptance and mental tenacity, with residents joining in on the activities that are offered and taking the time to talk to others. They are distracting themselves and keeping their minds active.

"One of the great things has been the video calls to link residents with their loved ones. Many residents have a mobile phone, or a fixed phone in their room. This has also been a wonderful way to connect with family.

"It might not replace the physical presence, but it helps greatly. Technology, while confusing for the older generation, has been so helpful in helping them to cope."

Kate says that families and carers are going through their own emotional roller coasters, similar to residents, as they too are being restricted. However, she notes that most of families and carers continually state how happy, relieved and grateful they are for the care and support their loved ones are getting.

"They want to keep their loved ones safe, and they feel we are doing a great job. So, there is relief for them. Some of the relatives are partners to a resident here, their husband or wife. For them it is particularly difficult, so the video calls have been a great gift.

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“The husband of one of our residents told me his greatest fears were that he’d never see his wife again, and that she, due to her dementia, wouldn’t remember him because he wasn’t regularly there to see her. For this couple, I have encouraged the video calls.

“Our dementia residents have good and bad days with technology. The picture of their loved one on a screen, is an oddity to them. They look around and behind the phone to try and see the back of their loved one!”

As well as providing support for residents to connect with their families, Kate, and all of our Pastoral Care Practitioners offer spiritual and religious support.

“I provide reading materials, maybe a prayer or an article to read, and Sunday bulletins to those who would like them. With the help of our Lifestyle team, we also provide Mass online in small groups, as well as encouraging some of our residents to lead the Rosary. While we were in lockdown, residents watched Mass via iPads, as they needed to remain in their rooms.”

While Kate and the team do their best to ensure the health and wellbeing of their residents, there are a number of challenges that she and all members of the Bundoora team face daily.

“There is never enough time. It is also difficult, with the challenges around those residents who have died during this time, and how we connect with the families. It is not easy.”

And then it comes to any words of advice for the broader community?

“Don’t waste our efforts to protect people. Help us to do this, with the regulations put in place for our good. They are not easy for any of us, but, this is about the ‘we’ in community, not the I.”

Image: Alfonso and Aurelia, residents from Bundoora Aged Care Residence

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.

