



## **B&M Care Covid-19 Response**

### **1.0 Introduction**

In early January 2020 we had our usual post-Christmas company celebration and our first Annual Rose Model of Dementia Care Awards. We were aware of the novel Coronavirus epidemic in Wuhan, China- but at that time had no real idea of the impact this disease would have across the world.

From February onwards, this viral illness, which officially became a global pandemic on March 11<sup>th</sup>, has dominated our care business, and continues to do so.

We have been consumed with implementing new policies, protocols and procedures, taking note of rapidly changing Government Guidelines, as well as reports and advice from professional organisations, learning from our own experiences and doing all we can to support and protect our elderly residents and our staff.

Like most Care Home Providers, B&M Care has had cases of Covid-19 among residents and staff. However, on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2020 we currently have no active cases of Covid-19 in the group.

What follows is a summary of what has been implemented to date (July 13<sup>th</sup> 2020), and what we are now doing in our homes to continue to provide a safe and meaningful environment for the people we look after.

### **2.0 Our Covid-19 Response Team**

From February, we've held regular Covid-19 Response Meetings involving members of the Senior Management of the company, including the Chairman, CEO, Clinical Director, Operations Director, Facilities Director, Lifestyle Director, Systems Director, Finance Director and other key individuals when required. The frequency of these meetings has altered depending on the current need but has been no less than weekly throughout the pandemic and sometimes daily at the peak. These meetings are where we discuss and agree our Coronavirus strategy and make key decisions which are then implemented in the care homes.

The Clinical and Operations Directors have held 3 x weekly conference calls with the Operations Managers where the strategy is passed on verbally and then cascaded out to the homes by them. We also hold fortnightly conference calls with all our Home Managers where they are encouraged to ask questions/share concerns about Covid-19 related issues. All strategy updates are sent out by e-mail.

Our Operations Managers and the Clinical and Operational Directors also regularly visit homes and speak to our Managers and staff individually as is normal procedure for us at B&M Care, and we have maintained good levels of contact during the pandemic as we saw it as important that our homes did not feel in any way abandoned by Senior Management. During any visits to homes our Operations team have always adhered to strict infection control precautions, worn the necessary PPE and minimised exposure to our residents. At the height of the first wave of Covid-19, we did limit our visits from the Operations Team to the homes most in need.



*'Keeping safe from Coronavirus'*

Last update 13/07/2020

We have remained in close contact throughout with our Local Authorities and our CQC inspectors, as well as our partners in NHS Primary and Secondary Care.

We have used the following key publications to inform our strategy:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-admission-and-care-of-people-in-care-homes>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-how-to-work-safely-in-care-homes>

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

<https://www.bgs.org.uk/resources/coronavirus-current-information-and-advice>

<https://www.bushproof.com/care-homes-strategy-for-infection-prevention-control-of-covid-19-based-on-clear-delineation-of-risk-zones/>

### 3.0 Infection Control

Infection control has been at the heart of our Covid-19 response strategy since early February when we started putting things together.

All our care homes have been operating a system of enhanced infection control throughout the pandemic.

[Appendix 1 – Enhanced Infection Control Measures in Response to Covid-19](#) shows the summary of additional infection control measures taken in our care homes (excluding PPE) in response to Covid-19.

And [Appendix 2 – Facilities Required by the Home in Response to Covid-19](#) shows a summary of the additional facilities made available to the homes to be able to carry out effective social distancing and enhanced infection control.

All staff receive training in Infection Control and we have systems of ensuring all staff are up to date with this. We have also ensured that all staff have received additional training from the local CCGs in 'donning and doffing' PPE. Our Training Manager also attended this course so we can continue the sessions for all new staff.

[Appendix 3 – B&M Care Infection Control Audit](#) shows the in-depth infection control audits we undertake in all our care homes, which have been amended to include a section on Covid-19, and the frequency of doing these has been increased to 3 monthly. We have created smaller weekly Infection Control Audits to bridge the gap between the more detailed ones.

### 4.0 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Since the very start of March all our homes have had sufficient PPE to work in accordance with all government guidelines.

Since 11<sup>th</sup> April, we've provided fluid-repellent surgical masks to all our staff working in care homes, head office and our workmen, including sub-contractors who have occasion to go into care homes for essential reasons. We have also provided all staff at higher risk from Covid-19 related illness FFP2 masks to offer them enhanced protection.



*'Keeping safe from Coronavirus'*

Last update 13/07/2020

In order to ensure that our staff have received sufficient PPE, we decided to centralise procurement and distribution of masks, aprons and gloves to the homes. This involved setting up a central procurement and distribution and tracking team to allow us to procure stock in bulk and distribute to the homes relative to their requirements. This central procurement and distribution initiative remains in place for PPE where the supplies are still limited.

All staff have had training in PPE 'donning and doffing' and there are posters in all our facilities reminding people how to wear PPE in accordance with the DHSC 'How to Work Safely in Care Homes' document.

## 5.0 Cohorting

During a Covid-19 outbreak, we have been cohorting areas according to Covid-19 -status. Going forward, we intend to categorise this more formally using a traffic light system to delineate Red (Covid-19), Amber (unknown) and Green (non-Covid-19) areas in our care homes. [Appendix 4 – Traffic Light System](#) shows the categorisation structure.

In order to improve cohorting within our homes, we have been carrying out a programme of physical works to create more segregated areas, including Rainbow Admission Suites (see section 8.0 Admissions for further information).

In addition to the above, we are closely managing care staff in the homes to ensure that they only work in one of our care homes at a time to minimise the risk of Covid-19 transmission between homes. We are also closely controlling Agency staff usage and have been able to keep this to very low levels throughout the pandemic.

Some of our care homes have also been able to provide temporary in-home accommodation to staff to reduce travel and mixing within the wider community and the risk transmission.

## 6.0 Caring for Residents

### 6.1 Clinical

Caring for the residents in our homes has been a priority for us since the virus first became a threat. We took the step of actively 'cocooning' our homes, stopping all non-essential external visitors and trips out, on 11<sup>th</sup> March. It was not an easy decision at the time, as other providers and government advice was not to do that. Government advice to suspend all but essential visits followed on 2<sup>nd</sup> April.

In March we started daily tracking of all suspected Covid-19 cases in staff and residents across our group of 26 care homes. This enabled us to identify early any emerging outbreaks.

Where we had cases, we followed Health Professional and Public Health England advice.

All homes have a 'Covid-19 prepare checklist' which they go through on at least a monthly basis (see [Appendix 5 – Covid-19 -Prepare Checklist](#)).

All suspected Covid-19 cases in residents are immediately placed in their bedrooms and kept separate from other residents for 14 days. Their health needs are addressed as a priority.



*'Keeping safe from Coronavirus'*

Covid-19 testing is arranged for them as well as any contacts. While in isolation, their well-being and nutritional needs are catered for.

[Appendix 6 – Covid-19 Drill / Suspected Case Response](#) shows the flowchart for suspected cases/outbreaks in our care homes. This is also the format of a 'Covid-19 Drill' that our managers go through with senior members of their staff on a monthly basis, as part of their preparation for future outbreaks.

## 6.2 Resident Well-being

We have been very mindful that although the main focus has been to protect residents from the virus, that we maintain an atmosphere of engagement and wellbeing.

Initiatives have included:

- Weekly residents' newsletters have been distributed to all homes. This has reassured residents and helped to explain some of the things they will have been hearing about on the news and reading in newspapers. It is also an opportunity to invite and encourage residents to join in the communal activities safely. Sharing with residents our safety protocols, our response to Government guidance and encouraging them to join in activities and events in the homes;
- Companywide themes to encourage creativity, fun and bringing the company together across all homes, departments and local communities. These have included Rainbow Day, Butterfly Day, Gardening and World Chocolate Day. Residents have benefitted from a whole home project and feeling part of the wider B&M family. Also, an opportunity to engage safely with the local community as many of the projects have been large art work displayed outside the homes;
- External entertainers have performed outdoors in some homes – encouraging staff and residents to sing, dance and reminisce. Music is at the heart of engaging with each other. These performances have often been recorded to show relatives and friends;
- Individual activity bags, trays, baskets have been distributed for those residents having to isolate on their rooms. Although this has been particularly difficult for some residents, the benefit of 1:1 engagement with staff has been of great benefit, allowing for specific and person-centered activity conversations;
- Corridor activities such as chair exercise, singing, quizzes and poetry readings have taken place, with residents in isolation participating from their doorways. A great sense of fun! And still being able to socialise safely while enjoying the positive benefits of music, physical exercise and mental stimulation;
- Volunteers, Hosting Assistants and Wellbeing Hosts have enhanced staff teams in order to ensure companionship and time available to support residents;
- Activity ideas and suggestions for individuals and socially distanced groups have been circulated regularly;



*'Keeping safe from Coronavirus'*

Last update 13/07/2020

- Special events such as birthdays and anniversaries have continued to be celebrated;
- A range of communication methods have been used to keep residents in touch with family, friends, volunteers and the wider community including; skype, face time, mobile phones, zoom, and letter writing;
- Since early June safely managed family visits have been taking place in facilities we have created or adapted for this purpose;
- Staff skills and talents have been maximized! – including performances and hair dressing while external visitors have been unable to come in to homes;
- The addition of small cottages, hand built during lockdown by B&M Care Chairman Mr Hughes, in the grounds of 4 of our homes has provided a safe space to be adapted for a range of activities. At a time when residents are restricted to the home's indoor and outside environments, they have enjoyed quiet space for reflection and companionship, art groups, cocktail making, gardening projects and they have also been used as we have introduced planned visits with relatives and friends; and
- In August we are hoping to restart carefully managed drives out for residents in company vehicles.

## 7.0 Caring for Staff

We know that social care staff have been shown to be at high risk from the effects of Covid-19.

We have ensured that all our staff working in homes have had the recommended PPE for care home staff since the start of the pandemic.

On 9<sup>th</sup> April we extended this to all staff and workmen going into our homes being supplied with sufficient facemasks to be able to wear them at all times while at work.

On 11<sup>th</sup> April we included Head Office staff and home workers as we were aware that the virus can exist on paper/other surfaces and we wanted to prevent it from being transmitted on Head Office paperwork etc.

All of our staff who have been identified as being in a high-risk category for Covid-19 infection, have undertaken a risk assessment, and measures put in place to enable them to have extra protection at work. Where there is a need they have been issued with FFP2 masks rather than standard type 2 surgical masks.

We have made our care homes as Covid-19 secure as possible, to enhance the safety of both residents and staff.

All our staff have received infection control training and PPE training and continue to do so.

We have created changing facilities so our staff can get changed in comfort at work.

We provide facemasks for them to use if travelling on public transport to and from work.

We have tried to keep their spirits up with occasional gift deliveries to the homes.



*'Keeping safe from Coronavirus'*

We have remained in touch with them through our central e-mail system which we have used to send motivational messages and key pieces of advice from key organisations.

Our Chairman has written personal letters of thanks to all our staff several times throughout the past few months.

Our HR Manager is undertaking a 'Resilience Coaching' course specifically designed to support staff with the adverse mental health effects of Covid-19.

## **8.0 Admissions**

On 11<sup>th</sup> March when we went into our cocoon state, we started isolating all new admissions and returning hospital admissions for a period of 14 days and we are continuing to do this.

After the DHSC updated their admissions guidance on 6<sup>th</sup> April, and testing became more available, we only accepted admissions who had a negative Covid-19 test, or who had already isolated in hospital for 14 days since a positive test. These people were still isolated for 14 days after re-admission to our care home to protect against a possible false negative test result.

Going forward, where we have the space in a home, we are creating Rainbow Admission Suites for new residents, or returning hospital residents, so they can effectively isolate for 14 days, but with more space and amenities than the standard bedroom. Some residents (especially those with dementia) find it very difficult to remain in a bedroom at all times. So, in some cases, where it is possible and after discussion with all parties, we are looking to cohort small groups of new admissions together for the first 14 days, employing social distancing as much as possible. This will mean they are kept apart from the other residents in the home, but have the degree of social interaction that they need. [Appendix 7 Admissions Policy During the Covid-19 Pandemic](#) contains our current admissions procedure.

## **9.0 Visitors**

After the first round of Covid-19 screening in May indicated very low numbers of Covid-19 among care home staff and residents, we decided to consider a safe controlled re-introduction of visits from relatives.

We have created covered outdoors visiting areas in most of our homes. We encouraged our Managers to commence a programme of controlled visits, which have been successful and improved our residents' well-being.

Going forward we would like to allow handholding on visits, and we are trying to procure facemasks with a clear screen at the mouth so our residents can see their visitors smile. We hope to introduce these changes shortly.

[Appendix 8 – Guidance for Visitors](#) contains our current visitors' protocol and [Appendix 9 – Visitors Declaration Form](#) includes the visitors' declaration form all people entering our home must complete.



*'Keeping safe from Coronavirus'*

Last update 13/07/2020

## 10. Testing

Throughout the pandemic we have tested as often as we have had access to tests.

We have lobbied our MPs for better access to Covid-19 testing.

We completed the first round of asymptomatic swabbing of care home residents and staff in May.

We were very pleased with the government announcement on 3<sup>rd</sup> July that retesting is to be rolled out weekly for staff and monthly for residents, and as this document is being written we are also working on our strategy/protocol for how to implement this plan. And awaiting further advice/support from our Local Authorities.

[Appendix 10 - Draft Protocol for Regular Re-testing of Residents and Staff](#)

## 11. Compliance & Governance

While Covid-19 has taken over a large part of the normal operation in a care home, there are clearly many other daily considerations which do not go away. At the start of the pandemic, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) took the decision to stay out of care homes to reduce transmission risk, and our Local Authority Compliance Monitoring visits stopped as well.

CQC scheduled a telephone call with each of our Managers to discuss the Covid response and reassure themselves that it was satisfactory. They produce reports which are accessible via the home's webpage once we are sent the report.

The Local Authorities have used varying means to stay in touch with our homes, usually by a regular telephone call.

No concerns have been raised with any organisation about B&M Care's response.

We reduced our own in-house compliance inspections, although we resumed these in May when our Covid status dictated it was a low enough risk to recommence.

The Managers have been completing their regular monthly audits which have been overseen as usual by our Compliance Manager.

Safeguarding/DOLs standards have not changed and our central reporting system and analysis of these areas has not changed through the pandemic.

We have developed a governance table for the Covid-19 measures which is in [Appendix 11 - Package of Covid-related Governance Requirements for Care Home Managers and Rainbow Champions](#).

## 12. HR & Recruitment

When the pandemic started, we introduced the recruitment support team which was in place to assist homes with quick and effective recruitment of staff and volunteers.

We introduced a new temporary role "Hosting Assistant" who were there to support the care staff with ad-hoc roles as well as provide additional emotional wellbeing to the residents in the absence of their family and visitors.



*'Keeping safe from Coronavirus'*

*Last update 13/07/2020*

A new text line application number was activated to simplify the application process for candidates. The DBS offered free DBS checks for those applying for roles specifically to help the home through Covid-19 times.

Interviews were carried out via telephone or zoom to reduce the number of people coming to the home, and those who were successful were then invited in to fill out the relevant paperwork.

All staff have been issued with a voluntary Rainbow Covid-19 code of conduct which they have agreed to abide by and have signed.

In order to support the staff who were instructed by NHS or their GP to shield, were offered furlough instead of SSP to help them financially during the shielding timescale.

Staff have received regular communication from the HR department via email correspondence with updates throughout the pandemic.

Our Chairman has also written to staff directly with updates and messages of support.

Now we are entering a “new normal” interviews are as much as possible conducted face to face but socially distanced outside in the garden or exterior areas of home.

Care home staff have received a bonus reward during the pandemic to recognise their hard work and loyalty throughout.

Staff from Fledglings nursery were deployed within the local homes as Hosting Assistants to support the homes throughout the pandemic whilst the nursery was temporally closed during early stages of the pandemic.

Our Head of HR is undertaking Resilience Coach Training to equip herself to support staff with some of the adverse mental health effects the pandemic is having on our staff so that further support can be provided.

### **13. Facilities Management & Repairs and Maintenance**

At the time of ‘cocooning’ our homes back in March we suspended almost all Planned Preventative Maintenance (PPM) works in the homes and only permitted what we deemed to be absolutely essential works. We have continued to review and assess what we deem to be essential relative to the risk posed by the coronavirus and have gradually allowed more PPM works to be undertaken.

Where we do allow external specialist contractors in to our homes to carry out works, we take all reasonable steps to reduce the transmission risk to protect them and the people inside our care home. They are subject to our Visitors Protocol and entry/exit procedure to ensure they adhere to our infection control procedures. In addition to this, we have set up a PPM calendar so all PPM visits can be booked in advance to ensure Home Managers know who is visiting the home and when.

With regard to repairs and maintenance, our B&M workmen have received our Infection Control Training module which includes donning and doffing of PPE. They are all subject to our PPE policy and are expected to wear masks at all times when undertaking work for B&M Care. They have also all been asked to sign up to our Rainbow Code of Conduct. Repairs and Maintenance works are only carried out currently if it is deemed to be essential. Our workmen will not enter zones in a care home where there are residents with suspected or confirmed Covid-19 unless it was absolutely



*'Keeping safe from Coronavirus'*

*Last update 13/07/2020*

necessary for the well-being of the resident for example taking in a hospital bed (wearing appropriate PPE).

#### **14. Information Technology**

Our IT department has put the following in place to support the Covid-19 response:

- Facilitating the use of video conferencing / teleconferencing so that management teams could continue to plan and co-operate remotely, and to support the delivery of remote training;
- Setting the administration teams up with equipment, connectivity and telecoms to allow them to function effectively working from home. Similarly, with regards to Home Managers required to stay away from their Homes due to self-isolation;
- Set up of internal messaging system to enable admin teams to communicate instantly. Monitoring and response to newly created IT Support subgroup of messaging system to troubleshoot issues faced by home workers unfamiliar with the new way of working;
- Supporting Care Homes with equipment to facilitate communication for residents with the outside world from within their cocoon;
- Careful management of resource and technology so that IT staff stay out of Homes as much as possible while still being able to resolve urgent problems;
- Equipping all Homes with access to NHS Mail to enable more effective communications with the health services; and
- We have also invested in an upgrade to our existing e-mail system during the pandemic which was necessary due to the sudden increase in the number of large e-mails being sent to groups of people.

#### **15. Training**

Since the Covid-19 response from head office and skills for care advice, the training plans and subjects delivered have altered to meet the needs of the homes whilst ensuring training takes place. These have regularly been updated as Guidance has been made available from the regulator and government bodies.

Practical skills have been assessed and monitored within each home.

Where training takes place in house, social distancing and appropriate PPE is worn.

Zoom training sessions are being held on a regular basis by the Training Manager to support all the care staff across the homes.

In addition to the care staff, all workmen that carry out repairs and maintenance across our homes have all been briefed on the Infection Control measures that have to be adhered to when working in or around the homes.

Training is a vital aspect of embedding robust infection control measures across our homes and will remain to be at the forefront of our on-going implementation efforts.



*'Keeping safe from Coronavirus'*

## 16. Communication

As described above, senior members of the Management Team and Directors have met regularly before and throughout the pandemic to devise and steer the Covid-19 response. Strategy updates have been cascaded down via e-mail and verbally in our conference calls with Operations Managers and Home Managers. Within homes key updates have been relayed to the front-line team at handovers, staff garden meetings, and individual conversations.

At the start of the pandemic we set up a new e-mail group so we could get key messages out to every employee in the company. We also organised an Operations Manager WhatsApp group, and a Manager WhatsApp group for peer support, as well as several Slack groups for IT and peer support for home workers. Several of our care homes have done this for staff too.

For residents and relatives, we have sent out monthly letters by e-mail with updates on the Covid-19 situation and response in our company, and we have responded to individual queries by phone, in person or by e-mail.

We have regularly updated our website and produced FAQs for our relatives and the public.

We have also kept up our Social Media coverage, reporting on some of the Covid-19 issues, and also highlighting how life continues for our residents within B&M Care homes.

Our Chairman (who is in a higher risk category) has maintained contact with all the homes' Managers with periodic phone calls, letters and more recently has re-started garden visits to care homes taking all the required infection control precautions.



*'Keeping safe from Coronavirus'*