

To anyone interested in knowing the reality of how the care industry has treated the elderly and the vulnerable during the months of lock-down:

If the media, the government and the NHS are to be believed then the situation within the care industry in the wake of COVID-19 couldn't be more laudable. Everyone "*staying safe*", keeping away from their loved ones in order to "*save granny*" and that, especially, of course, applies to care-home residents who are being kept well and safe by the companies that house them. We have no need to be concerned for the well-being of those individuals in the care of the industry, past ensuring that the "*killer virus*" remains out of the home. The reality is, I'm afraid, rather more insidious. I am a healthcare assistant (HCA) who works for an agency providing staff within several north-west care settings and, during the initial outbreak, had a permanent contract with a care-home for which I no longer work. Having worked throughout lock-down and seen the damage done it would be both professionally and morally remiss of me not to try and expose the terrible reality of living in care-homes thanks to the blatant over-reaction to the coronavirus outbreak.

I have worked in the care industry for nine years first as a student nurse then six years as a HCA, and I'd like to give you a little insight into my job role so you can best understand the nature of my position and that of those I support. In my role as an agency carer I tend to exclusively work on a "*one to one*" basis within care-homes. This generally entails working with mentally ill people who require extra support during the day due to challenging/violent behaviour, high anxiety, or who present a high risk of falling, and working with them exclusively to maintain their safety and well-being. In my previous second job I worked as an HCA within the dementia/challenging behaviour unit of a care-home owned by the company HC1, for which I worked throughout the first phase of the outbreak/lock-down and later resigned as a result of what I saw there pertaining to COVID-19.

My experience of working through COVID-19 has been one that can best be described as harrowing, heartbreaking, and infuriating, and which has left me with a sense of loss and emptiness that borders on overwhelming. But not for the reasons the media, this government nor the NHS would have you believe. COVID-19 has brought out the very worst in the care industry giving our managers, team leaders and head office *carte blanche* to run roughshod over the rights of both their staff and their residents. I have listed a few of the things I have experienced and witnessed as a result:

1. Fear mongering; resident's families have on at least two occasions made it clear their relative was not to attend hospital under any circumstances resulting in at least two residents falling gravely ill due to not receiving treatment for their respiratory problems (neither were tested for COVID-19). This was a result of advice given to the families by management.
2. Forced mask wearing; myself and all staff were forced to wear surgical masks for the duration of our 12hr shifts and exemptions were not allowed despite a few of my colleagues having asthma and one having COPD. The result of us being forced to wear masks for such long periods included staff suffering from severe dehydration, anxiety attacks, exacerbated asthma symptoms, dizziness, nausea, loss of appetite, chest/throat pain, mouth ulcers, poor skin health, and increased risk of being attacked by our dementia-suffering residents who were intimidated and confused by our concealed faces. Mask wearing did not prevent myself nor several of my

colleagues from falling ill over the course of the outbreak despite rigorous guidelines and correct use of PPE.

3. Forced testing; management made it absolutely clear within the HC1 home that staff who did not get tested for COVID-19 on a weekly basis would be refused shifts despite this being a clear breach of contract. The same home also demanded that all their residents be tested for COVID-19 (later when the tests became more widely available around late spring to summertime) including those with dementia who had to be held down in their beds or chairs while a nurse performed the extremely invasive procedure. This caused such distress to the confused people that many of them screamed, cried in fear, and thrashed about violently causing themselves injury. Despite this failure to act in the "*best interests*" of the residents, management did not alter their instructions and the testing continued regardless of the danger and distress it put the staff and residents in. Another home run by "Century Care" has declared it a disciplinary offence, which would result in being sacked, to refuse COVID-19 tests or even to argue with the management against such a decision. Another violation of worker's human rights.
4. Neglected residents; all the NHS GPs registered to residents living within this HC1 care-home refused to come to the home for any reason including emergency appointments and certifying death. The district nurses also refused to enter the care-home for any reason during the first few months of lock-down.
5. Deaths through loneliness; when the lock-down started residents were banned from having relatives visit for any reason. The consequences of this decision has resulted in residents, whose routine revolved around frequent visits from family/friends, becoming depressed, increasing their confusion and affecting their well-being to the point they refused to eat, drink or leave their beds. One gentleman went from walking and eating a good diet to refusing almost all food. He just sat listless in his room calling out for his wife. The end result was he had to be put on end-of-life care as he wasted away to skin and bones. Other residents who were denied their visitors took to frequent bouts of anxiety and depression, asking staff to kill them because they didn't want to live without their loved ones. At least two ladies became tearful daily because, due to their confused mental state, they thought they had done something to make their family hate them and that was why they weren't coming any more. Another gentleman, who had only weeks before been diagnosed with terminal cancer, was denied any visits from his wife/daughters until he was basically on death's door. Needless to say the pain and hurt this caused him and his wife was indescribable. It is worth noting that the residents who did not have visitors at all, or very infrequently, did not show any such symptoms of mental and physical deterioration. We lost several residents during lock-down. Out of all of them, only one was as a result of COVID-19. So out of the six residents who tested positive for the illness, five made a complete recovery.
6. Lack of basic acts of kindness; due to social distancing rules, which we were told to adhere to when not performing personal care, if a resident became upset or anxious we were forbidden from hugging them or holding their hands. Simple acts that make all the difference to distressed, mentally ill people were denied and often caused additional misery for these poor souls.

These are a few of the worst things I have seen whilst working through COVID-19. The care industry has forced otherwise compassionate and caring people to become more akin to jailers than carers. We are forcing the vulnerable and the mentally ill to stay in their rooms, denying them contact with the outside world, withdrawing simple comfort, treating them like lepers and numbers rather than people, and ultimately ignoring the importance of quality of life over quantity. A total contradiction of a carer's role. A once rewarding, though challenging and taxing, job has become a pale list of drudgery and distress as government mandated abuse is carried out not just with impunity but also with the audacity to claim it's doing everyone some good. I never imagined a world where I would leave my vocation in disgust and outrage but that is exactly what I am doing, I am seeking employment away from the "*care*" industry because my conscience can no longer be put on hold.

I hope this information proves useful and that this awful situation is laid bare for all to see the truth.

Kind regards

A concerned carer.