



St Maximilian Kolbe House
63 Jeddo Road
London
W12 9EE

tel: 020 8749 1321
e-mail: info@catholicunion.org.uk
web: www.catholicunion.org.uk

Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care
Department for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London, SW1H 0EU

Sent by email only to: pshelenwhately@dhsc.gov.uk

03 June 2020

Dear Minister,

Re: Upholding the dignity of older people

Coronavirus is having an impact on people across the country.

The Government's scientific advice and statistics show that older people are amongst some of the worst affected, and people in care homes are particularly vulnerable.

I hope you will consider our proposals, below, for how we can uphold the dignity of older people during this difficult time and recognise the profound importance of care work to society.

The Catholic Union is a membership organisation, which represents the views and interests of 4.5 million Catholics in Britain.

As Catholics, we keenly feel the need to look after the most vulnerable in society. Catholic organisations have long attended to pastoral care for older people, with religious orders traditionally helping to provide care in communities across the country. The Church continues to play an important role looking after older people. I recommend [Care in Time](#), published by the Caritas Social Action Network last year, which highlights the importance of Catholic care.

We welcome the measures taken by the Government so far to reduce the spread of the virus in care homes. I know that in recent weeks, the number of deaths from coronavirus among care home residents has reduced, but it is still a high proportion of the total number of deaths.

At this difficult time, it's vital we give people who live and work in care homes all the support they need. That's why we're contacting you with our proposals for improving life for people in residential care. Our proposals are set out below:

Visiting policy. We welcomed the comments from the Health Secretary last month about close family members being allowed to visit dying residents, whenever possible, and for those residents to receive palliative care. However, at present the guidance states that only family members can visit people who are dying. Making allowance for close friends and priests to visit those nearing the end of their lives would be extremely welcome. Direction could be given on this through changes to existing guidance.

Do not resuscitate orders. We are concerned that some people in care homes are signing DNR orders without the chance to consult loved ones. The Government's Care Home Action Plan states that "people in care homes and their families should be involved, as much as possible, in planning and decisions about their health and care, including end of life care". But with general visits to care homes banned and social distancing in place, it is hard to see how proper consultation could take place. Rather than rushing residents in care homes to sign DNR orders, it would be better to have a general policy of attempting to resuscitate a resident in need of this help unless their wishes were

The Catholic Union of Great Britain: The Voice of Catholics in Public Life

President: Sir Edward Leigh, MP

Vice-Presidents: Mike Kane MP, Baroness Hooper, Baroness Morris of Bolton OBE, Lord Clarke of Hampstead CBE, KSG, Mr Robert Ffello, Professor John Haldane, Baroness Hollins, Dr Terence Morris, Mr John Deighan KSG, Dr Anthony Cole KCSG, Mr John Barrie KCSG, Mr Michael Henderson KCHS

clearly expressed on or before 23 March when the lockdown measures came into force. National guidance on when and how DNR decisions should be made would be welcome.

Occupational therapy and activities. Occupational therapy is vital to many people who need care, particularly at this time when friends and family are unable to make regular visits to care homes. We welcome the work being done by the Health & Care Professionals Council (HCPC) to encourage occupational therapists who have left the profession in the last three years to re-register in response to the current pandemic. We urge the Government to ring-fence funds for occupational therapy in the care sector. Much of the additional funding to date has been used to cover additional costs of personal protective equipment, which is vital to keeping people safe, but the on-going needs of people in care homes must not be forgotten. Staff in care homes should also be encouraged to continue a full programme of activities for residents, wherever possible, to keep people active and improve mental health. Guidance on this from your Department would give care providers greater confidence to run activities.

Carers from overseas. The announcement by the Home Secretary in April to automatically grant free visa renewals to key workers in the NHS and social care is welcome. However, this announcement does not cover all people in the care sector, and we hope you will urge the Home Secretary to expand the policy to include all people from overseas working in our care homes.

Improving testing arrangements. We appreciate the Government has worked hard to increase testing capacity. Care providers are reporting an increase in momentum behind the testing programme with many homes now able to access whole home testing for both residents and staff. However, there is significant regional variation in both the scale and efficiency of testing, with some homes having to wait several weeks for results, rendering them out of date before they arrive. The problem now seems to be one of logistics rather than capacity. We would welcome clarity from the Government on who is responsible for administering tests in care homes. The Government should also consider an emergency testing facility for care homes where local arrangements are not adequate or where there are suspected outbreaks of the virus.

These proposals would help bring light to care homes across the country during these dark days.

I hope you will find time to consider them.

I look forward to hearing from you.



Nigel Parker
Director
The Catholic Union of Great Britain
Email: director@catholicunion.org.uk

cc.
- Phil McCarthy, Chief Executive, CSAN