



15th March 2020

Dear Aged Care Facility,

The purpose of this letter is to lend support to your decision to implement the restriction of visitor access (“lockdown”) at your facility.

The Hunter General Practitioners Association is a group which consists of the majority of the general practitioners in the Hunter Valley. We recognise that Aged Care Facility residents are at very high risk from the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because:

- the death rate from COVID-19 is highest in the elderly
- the death rate is highest in people with many chronic health problems
- once occurring within any nursing home it likely to spread rapidly to other residents and staff
- staff exposed may need to be isolated at home, making it difficult to find staff to look after residents
- in the height of a local epidemic, infected nursing home patients might not be able to obtain hospital or ICU beds
- there might be insufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) to look after patients
- treatment by GPs in the nursing home might only be possible by telehealth measures.

Clearly the best management is prevention. We recognise that active screening is of limited effectiveness (due to issues with equipment reliability, reliability of history, the asymptomatic infective period). This leaves the restriction of visitor access (“lock-down”) as the best option. Early implementation is likely to be more effective.

Stressing early social distancing and hygiene to all staff will be the other prevention arm, as well as keeping away any staff member who has a fever or respiratory symptoms.

We realise that there will be distressed relatives. Alongside other measures, you may choose to include the following letter of support with any explanation given to family.

Yours faithfully,

Dr John Goswell
Chair
Hunter General Practitioners’ Association



HUNTER GENERAL PRACTITIONERS ASSOCIATION

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To the family member,

Your Aged Care Facility has taken the important step of restricting visitor access (“locking down”) the facility in order to protect your family member. This decision has not been taken lightly, and is a necessary step that we support.

People who have COVID-19 are possibly contagious for 24 hours before they develop any symptoms. This means that they can give the disease to their family member even when they think that they are well.

If a family member gets COVID-19, it will not be like seasonal influenza. It is more contagious and more deadly. COVID-19 kills at least seven times more people than seasonal influenza.

Most people who die will be old, and/or suffering from health conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure, lung disease, and diabetes. Most of the residents in this facility will have several of these conditions, and so are at very high risk of dying if they catch COVID-19.

The expected mortality for a person aged over 80 years, if they are infected with COVID-19, is 1 in 6.

The number of people who will eventually become infected with COVID-19 in the Hunter Valley is expected to be between 100,000 and 250,000, and we need to do our best to protect your family member from that. The number of people in the Hunter Valley expected to need an ICU bed is 6,000 to 15,000. There may not be enough ICU beds to meet that demand, and so we hope to prevent your family member from needing one in the first place.

So the restricted access (“lockdown”) is imperative to properly protect your family member, and all other residents within the aged care facility. We unreservedly support this action, and trust you appreciate the necessity.

Yours faithfully,

Dr John Goswell
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Chair, Hunter General Practitioners' Association