

Madame Chairperson and Committee Members –My name is Char Schmidt and I am the Regional Vice President for Edgewood Healthcare and oversee the operations of all the Edgewood locations in ND

From the beginning we have been trying to follow all the rules and recommendations that have come from the CDS, CMS, Dept of Health, VP3 and our own Edgewood Incident Command. We continue to follow all the guidelines for screening, masking, distancing and hand sanitization.

When it was allowed, we did open up outside visitation despite some difficulties in monitoring this. When it was allowed, we also started supervised indoor visitation, which was much better for residents, families and our ability to monitor. This past fall, when CMS enforced visitation restrictions for skilled nursing, the Assisted living and basic care communities advocated for our residents by asking for and receiving less restrictive visitation guidelines - these were implemented in early November.

Unfortunately, that was right when some of the highest covid cases were occurring in long term care so some locations had to wait. Even if the guidelines had permitted visitation, we were busy trying to care for residents with whatever available staff we had and we simply would not have been able to accommodate any kind of safe visitation – even outdoor.

But throughout all of this, I think AL/BC have done a great job. We have always allowed for hospice and end of life care, compassionate care visits and accommodated unusual situations and requests. We have accommodated dedicated family caregivers by including them in our employee testing events and restricting their movement throughout the building. We have done tons of facetime, zoom calls, and live streaming events like funerals and graduations. When we were told that any resident post covid had a 90 window of some immunity, we promoted and encouraged them to get out and visit family since they would not be subject to a 14 day quarantine when they returned.

As of today, all of our Edgewood communities continue with in house visitation but we have not done in room yet except in some of our memory care neighborhoods that are much smaller. Because these communities are large, we have found that is much easier to accommodate safe visitation in dedicated areas so that we can provide the required monitoring. The other reason is that the guidelines require us to stop in room visitation if we at any time have an outbreak – which is considered to be one positive resident or employee. Even though the current positivity rate is really low right now, it's not unusual to have one positive case. As we finish up second round vaccinations, we are eagerly waiting for more guidance on our next steps.

I know that you have heard concerns about visitation from families and residents, we have heard them too. But mostly we hear the appreciation for all we are doing to keep our residents safe. We have received countless notes of thanks, gifts, food etc. from families to thank and support our staff especially when we have had outbreaks and we couldn't safely support visitation. We are grateful for their support.

Through all the regulations, recommendations and rules, we have appreciated the flexibility to make things more stringent if necessary. This was important based on the outbreak situation in a county, in a building or just available staff at any given time. This also helps when you have AL/BC communities that range in size – from very small, to very large across the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some information about how visitation is going from an Assisted Living and Basic Care perspective.