



May 27, 2020

RE: COVID 19 Update

Dear Patrons, Family Members and Loved Ones of South Carolina,

Many of you have inquired as to when the visiting restrictions will be relaxed so that you may see your loved one face to face. As of this writing, we have not been provided specifics by The Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), which is our licensing authority here in South Carolina. The most recent direction given to us by the DHEC is that the shelter in place and lock-down restrictions for senior care communities remains effective through June 12, 2020. This does not mean the doors will open on June 13th, far from it.

At this time, we want to provide as much insight as possible as to what you can expect in the future as it relates to visitations. We completely understand everyone's frustration, and are just as frustrated at the lack of direction ourselves. Our goal has always been to remain transparent and to pass along any and all of the information we receive. Most times, you receive as much information as a consumer as we do as the provider.

The only official guidance we have received to date comes from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This Federal agency primarily oversees nursing homes that provide Medicare and Medicaid funded skilled nursing services. While we do not fall under CMS governance, DHEC tends to take guidance and adopt recommendations from CMS. The current CMS protocols required before a community may re-open its doors to visitors is baseline testing of all residents, employees and vendors. This testing needs to be immediately available for any resident or employee displaying CV19 symptoms. Finally, the community must have the capacity to continue testing on a weekly basis. A link to the CMS FAQ's is below:

<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/covid-nursing-home-reopening-recommendation-faqs.pdf>

While there are several other proposed guidelines, we do not believe that providers have the testing capacity in place today to meet this requirement. Many questions remain. For example, can a resident refuse to be tested and can an employee or staff member refuse to be tested? If the answer is yes, what procedures or protocols will need to be implemented? How will this affect staffing? Strict social distancing, along with wearing masks, will be mandatory as well as likely time and amount of visitor limitations for the foreseeable future. While certainly not ideal, these measures continue to prioritize the health and safety of your loved ones.

Today, we have no clear guidance or specific date to offer for a re-opening. We continue to wait for direction and understand and sympathize with your concern and frustration. We are cautious of the risk of re-opening and trying to manage a virus that seeks shelter among our residents who are otherwise healthy, but not strong enough to survive the infection. It only takes one carrier to infect an entire community.

As soon as we have more guidance from the DHEC, we will pass along the information as soon as possible. Be well and stay safe.

Sincerely,

SSMG COVID Response Team