

COVID IN THE HOUSE OF OLD



Winnipeg - Annick Boulet – 30 June 2024

At the end of summer, early fall, then the government gave us money for screeners to screen at the door, and also to start to do the visits. But it was difficult, because there were so many rules, you know. Like the, you know, you needed that two-meter social distancing. And so, we had these long tables, and the resident would sit at one end of the table. The family member had to sit at the other end of the table. But in a lot of cases these people were deaf, or at least very hard of hearing, so they couldn't really hear. The conversation couldn't really happen. And then a lot of residents with dementia, you know, the communication can't even really be verbal, like the it's more like holding hands. And that kind of connections. So really, there was a lot of residents who were not even with these visits, were not getting visits. It didn't really work. And so, like we, we were basically like security guards, you know. And it was like we had to do all the screening, and it was like, you can't bring that in. And then once we saw that they were like coming closer. We're like, "Stop! You need to back off. You need to do this. No, you can't touch her. No, you can't bring your drinks in." It was all just like, I don't know, making sure that the rules are being followed because as a spiritual care provider, I felt like it was, it was very detrimental for the residents that how this was happening, and a lot of families were distressed by this and I, you know we were all distressed by it.

And so, it's hard when you're like, "You know, I wish you could do more for your loved one. Unfortunately, I am. My job is to is to keep you away." So, every time people complained to me, every time people complained to me, which was a lot. I just said to them, "I agree with you. It's not our choice. It's the provincial government. You need to write a letter to the provincial government." So that's what I did. I just said to them, "I understand. I agree with you, write a letter."

And so eventually the government agreed that not allowing residents to have like visitors was detrimental. So, they allowed ever since then, two essential visitors were allowed to come in, no matter what. So that was the big sort of turning point in the pandemic was, after, you know, a few months of lockdown two people were allowed to start coming in. And so that already made a huge difference, I think, for the residents. They were able to have at least two people inside who are allowed to be in their room and help them. So, things changed a lot in my own heart when families were allowed to come to come in.

Pandemic or no pandemic personal care homes are a bizarre place where you're always navigating between safety and sort of the dignity of risk, you know. And it's this bizarre balance that I don't think that we've achieved yet.

So, during the pandemic, for example our goal, the security was a top priority. And I understand, I mean, I was part of that mindset. That this was dangerous, and I didn't want fifty people to just randomly die, like terrifying. But at the same point, you know, like, you make all these decisions at the beginning, because it's just you can't imagine any other option. But eventually you realize that most of these people, the only reason they have any meaning in life is their family. And if you take that away from them, then all you're doing is keeping them alive without any value or meaning of life. And I suspect that almost the entirety of those residents, they would have rather died than to be kept away from their loved ones.

One of the reasons this project is so incredibly important to me is the idea of archiving this information because I don't want this to ever happen again. Like, there needs to be some sort of dignity of risk for people who would rather get COVID and die than to be alone. And a lot of residents who had dementia, you know, there was an incredible decrease in residents' capacity to function. And a lot of deaths just from loneliness. I mean, that's not proven, you know, it's my own sort of observation. But I'm sure I'm right, you know.

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