

Cassellholme Family Council Meeting

Held by *Zoom*, North Bay, ON

Monday March 8th, 2021

Welcome (2:00)

The Family Council met using *Zoom*. Blanche-Hélène Tremblay welcomed everyone to this special meeting of the Family Council.

Attendance (9)

Bonnie Bolger, Glenda Coleman, Karen Gooch (Recorder), Ann McIntyre, Monique Peters, Edith Prosser, Michelle Schmitt, Cathy Summers, Blanche-Hélène Tremblay (Chair)

Agenda

This meeting was called as a follow-up to our regular monthly meeting when we drafted a letter to Cassellholme to express our concerns about the fact that Essential Caregivers have been locked out of the facility.

Business Arising

Caregiver Lockout

Appendix I

Since the March 2nd meeting, Essential Caregivers had a chance to meet with CEO Jamie Lowery at a Zoom meeting on March 12th. The outbreak has been declared over and it was hoped that the lockout would be over as well. Several members also attended the Ontario North Family Council Network meeting this morning where the issue of locking out Essential Caregivers from LTC facilities across the region was discussed. Jillian Duchesne our Staff Assistant was present at both meetings. We continued our discussion about caregiver access and what further action we will take.

- Blanche-Hélène Tremblay asked those in attendance whether they wanted to continue pressing for caregiver access or drop the issue for the time being. One critical issue is that we have not been given any timeline for when all caregivers will be let back in. People who are providing meal assistance will be allowed in first and others will be delayed for an undetermined time. The consensus was that we should continue to make our case for a lifting of the lockout as soon as possible. Although, it is unsure if it will make any difference now, we are hoping that a lockdown can be avoided in the future.
- Jamie Lowery stated at the *Zoom* meeting that the staff members are worried about increased risk of a COVID-19 outbreak if caregivers are allowed in. Members of Family Council feel that this is not the case. We feel that since caregivers and staff are both allowed to go home to their families and participate in activities such as shopping as allowed under provincial guidelines, that caregivers do not present an increased risk to Cassellholme residents when compared to staff.
- Several questioned why caregivers are called ‘essential’, yet still not be given access to their loved ones. What does essential mean? Family Council members feel that Essential Caregivers should not be locked out even in the event of an outbreak. Not all LTC facilities do this.
- One reason given for the delay in lifting the lockout is that the rapid testing plans are not ready to be implemented yet. We feel that since the need for this has been known since mid-January, testing should be up and running. According to the provincial directives, facilities are given time after an outbreak to ensure testing protocols are in place, but there is nothing in the

directives that prevents caregivers from entering the facility (even during an outbreak).

- Based on our discussions, Blanche-Hélène drafted a second letter (Appendix I) to Cassellholme which was reviewed by those at the meeting. A copy will be sent to Dr. Chirico at the NBPSDHU, Chris Mayne, Chair of the Cassellholme Board of Management. The letter starts on a positive note. Cassellholme has done a better job at controlling outbreaks than a majority LTC facilities in the province and perhaps Family Council has played a role in that. Jamie Lowery was brave to put himself on the line by meeting directly with caregivers. Caregivers feel that communications from Cassellholme have improved since last March however, there is still room for improvement and we hope that more details of when caregivers can return will be forthcoming.
- Members offered thanks to Blanche-Hélène for her work on this and she encouraged members to keep asking questions.

Other Business

None

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, April 6th, 2021 at 2:00 p.m.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Chair, Blanche-Hélène Tremblay

Recorder, Karen Gooch

Cassellholme Family Council

Support - Communication - Education - Advocacy

Blanche-Hélène Tremblay, Chairperson, 52 Pargeter Drive, Astorville ON P0H 1B0

March 10, 2021

Mr. Jamie Lowery
Chief Executive Officer
Cassellholme East Nipissing District Home for the Aged
400 Olive Street
North Bay ON P1B 6J4

Summary

Cassellholme Family Council recommends that:

- (1) designated essential caregivers be given access to the home as quickly as possible to the maximum extent that is permitted by Directive #3 from the Ministry of Long-Term Care and
- (2) Cassellholme's definition of essential caregiver continue to include any individual whose presence is deemed essential by the resident or their substitute decision maker and who demonstrates commitment to following Cassellholme's guidelines for infection-control.

Dear Mr. Lowery,

As stated in its Terms of Reference, Cassellholme Family Council is strongly committed to supporting Cassellholme administration in its efforts to improve the quality of life of the people it serves in a safe and healthy environment. In keeping with its stated goals of providing a forum for family members to express their ideas and concerns, of working in coordination with the Administration of Cassellholme, and of advocating for better conditions for residents of Long-Term Care homes, we would like to convey to you the following concerns that have been shared by families following your Zoom meeting with essential caregivers this past Friday, March 5.

We, the members of Family Council, want to thank you for holding this Zoom meeting with essential caregivers. On the whole, Cassellholme's communication with families has shown great improvement since the first COVID-19 lockout of visitors. During the most recent lockout, information was relayed to families before it was released to the media, there were almost daily updates on the Cassellholme website and you held the Zoom meeting with essential caregivers to provide details about what it will take for them to return to Cassellholme. This enhancement of communication was welcomed by essential caregivers and other members of Family Council.

Essential caregivers felt respected hearing you explain, in your own words, the reasons why you decided to lock them out of Cassellholme. Your transparency was appreciated. This open

communication and transparency are the foundation for the trust and collaboration required for Cassellholme and its partners to work together effectively to meet the needs of the residents.

During the Zoom meeting, it was noted that you announced to essential caregivers that you plan on maintaining the present lockout of essential caregivers until at least March 15. As you undoubtedly would have known after reading the letter that was sent to you by email by the Chairperson of Family Council on March 3, as well as the letter that Family Council sent to Dr. Chirico with a copy to you on October 16, 2020, this announcement caused consternation and distress to many essential caregivers who were hoping to hear that the lockout would be lifted immediately and that they could resume their work of supporting their resident.

During the Zoom meeting, you spoke about the implementation of rapid antigen testing at Cassellholme. According to what we have read, rapid antigen testing was mandated by the MLTC in a January 27 memo to licensees of LTC homes. This directive, "COVID-19: Long-Term Care Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes" was subsequently updated and mandated to be effective as of February 16, 2021. In this most recent version, it is indicated that the directive relates to surveillance testing and access to long-term care homes that are not experiencing an outbreak of COVID-19. In the Q & A which followed on or about March 2nd, we read that "The rapid antigen testing program is suspended in an outbreak as all staff and residents must be tested using (diagnostic) PCR tests." This exception to the directive to fully implement rapid antigen testing by March 15 appears to allow for visits by essential caregivers during an outbreak such as the one experienced by Cassellholme between February 19 and March 5 and to continue for the three weeks that follow while the home implements rapid antigen testing.

According to family caregivers who were present at the Zoom meeting, you also indicated that Cassellholme staff did not feel safe when essential visitors are in the home. We count on your leadership and management skills to reassure staff. From an essential caregiver perspective, the presence of essential caregivers in the home is no more a threat to the health and safety of staff and residents than the presence of other members of staff who are all living out in the community. This is especially true now that Cassellholme has arranged for most essential caregivers to receive the first dose of the vaccine against COVID and that other caregivers are looking forward to their opportunity to receive this vaccine. Between April 24, 2020, and March 8, 2021, there were 3,748 resident deaths and 11 staff deaths in long-term care homes in all of the province of Ontario. Residents, not staff, are the ones who remain the most vulnerable to the worst consequences of this disease.

One more concern has been raised by essential caregivers following your Zoom meeting with them. It was understood and shared by some that the definition of essential caregiver is being revisited and that the very few caregivers who are involved with nutrition and feeding would be invited back in. Those who have been designated essential caregivers under the present policy insist however that their presence is required to give support for mobility, bathing, cognitive stimulation, communication, meaningful connection, relational continuity and assistance in decision making which are equally important. Their visits are also very valuable for ensuring that the resident's care plan is followed and modified as required. Even though Cassellholme's frontline workers are very caring, knowledgeable and efficient, essential caregivers are often the ones who know their resident best and are able to detect barely visible changes in their health. Caregivers who provide this type

of support are no less essential than someone who assists a resident with eating. The only visits that are not essential are those deemed unessential by the resident himself or herself.

Quality of life as well as quality of death are goals that many of us aim for. By locking out essential visitors, Cassellholme is depriving residents of the support that some of them need for both living and dying with comfort and dignity.

The only moment that is guaranteed to any of us, be it a member of staff or administration, a resident or a caregiver is “right now”. Many residents of Cassellholme are near last stages of life. In the opinion of the members of Family Council, it is pressing that Cassellholme admit essential caregivers as soon as possible so that those of us who are not here next month, next week, tomorrow or this evening can have that “essential visit” while it is still available to us. We hope that you have confidence in the ability and determination of essential caregivers to keep Cassellholme staff and residents healthy and safe. In the words of one family member, to prevent essential caregivers from spending time with their resident is “unthinkable and inexcusable”.

In closing, we, the members of Family Council, wish to reiterate our recommendations that

- (1) designated essential caregivers be allowed into the home as quickly as possible to the maximum extent that is permitted by Directive #3 from the Ministry of Long-Term Care, and
- (2) Cassellholme’s definition of essential caregiver continue to include any individual whose presence is deemed essential by the resident or their substitute decision maker and who demonstrates commitment to following Cassellholme’s guidelines for infection-control.

Sincerely,

Blanche-Hélène Tremblay

Blanche-Hélène Tremblay

Chairperson

On behalf of Cassellholme Family Council

Cc Chris Mayne, Chairperson, Cassellholme Board of Management
Dr. Jim Chirico, Medical Officer of Health for the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit