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ASSISTED LIVING: BOB ZEISS BEDSITTERS • EPWORTH CLOSE FRAIL CARE: CP BRADFIELD FRAIL CARE • MARANATHA FRAIL CARE

TO ALL RESIDENTS AND STAFF, AND THEIR LOVED ONES:

Monday 16 March 2020

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)

You will all know something about this subject, whether a little or a lot. We wish to put it into context by sharing some insights and information with you.

In the past few weeks the entire world has been turned upside down, on an unprecedented scale probably not witnessed since the outbreak of the Second World War. The Coronavirus pandemic (referred to as COVID-19) is manifesting itself across the globe; in some or other way the disease and its economic consequences and social impact will adversely affect the majority of the 7.8 billion people who live on this planet, and many will die as a result. There is no point in hiding the truth.

The 1918 influenza pandemic (known as the Spanish flu) infected 500 million people around the world, or about a quarter of the then world population of 1.9 billion. The death toll was estimated to have been anywhere from 17 million to 50 million, and possibly as high as 100 million, making it one of the deadliest epidemics in human history. Massive strides in medical science, cures and treatments have occurred in the century since then, enhanced by better hygiene, nutrition and health education. COVID-19 is not seen as a rampant “killer flu”.

Included in this mix is the fact that disease can now be carried from one side of the world to the other in less than a day. It's simple: about 500,000 airline passengers are estimated to be in the sky at any given time, and that means six million or more people fly somewhere every day.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Friday that Europe is the “epicentre” for the global COVID-19 pandemic, and warned it is impossible to know when the outbreak will peak. On the same day the USA declared a State of Emergency across that country. COVID-19 is now present in most countries across the globe.

COVID-19 has arrived on South African soil, but there is no report yet that it has hit our City. It will happen; we just don't know when, or to what extent. The situation is changing hourly. What we do know is that, as has happened everywhere else in the world so far, COVID-19 particularly preys on the elderly, the frail, those with compromised health, and the disadvantaged urban or rural communities. There is also no point in hiding this.

Depending on where in the world people are living, major and minor sporting, cultural or social events, cruises and conventions, holidays and much more have been postponed or cancelled; tourists have gone home, schools have been closed indefinitely, factory production has ground to a halt, offices have shut and employees have been instructed to work from home.

Against the background of all of these grim facts, let us share with you what Methodist Homes for the Aged (Eastern Cape), MHA, is doing in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents, staff, loved ones, and the wider MHA family:

- ✓ We have had a formal “Infection Control” policy in place for a long time, and it has been updated and adjusted to include COVID-19. This will guide and inform all staff
- ✓ Ten days ago we set up a formal committee (“CovidCom”) comprising Neil McLaggan (MHA Board Chairman), Malcolm Stewart (MHA Board Director), Hein Barnard (MHA CEO), Sr Sanet Marx (Nursing Services Manager/CP Bradfield Frail Care matron), Nelmar Windell (Maranatha Frail Care matron) and Gillian le Roux (MHA Professional Nurse/Counsellor). CovidCom has already met once, when specific actions and needs were identified, and are being acted upon on an urgent basis. We will probably co-opt others

METHODIST HOMES FOR THE AGED (EASTERN CAPE)

(Incorporated Association not for gain) Reg. No. 82/000127/08 003-688 NPO

DIRECTORS: NC McLaggan (CHAIRMAN) • M Burmeister • K Helm • L Lawson (RN) • T Songelwa (Ms) • MD Stewart
FOUNDER PRESIDENT: Rev G Irvine

- ✓ Hygiene is a critical factor which was identified, especially hand sanitization. Staff have been re-trained in this regard, and various items of additional equipment/stock are being sourced (currently in short supply globally), for use by staff and visitors alike
- ✓ Signage will be erected at all sites during the course of this week, emphasizing the need for hygiene by everyone entering a MHA facility and, equally important, to instruct any visitor carrying flu-like symptoms to stay away from our two Frail Care units, and to avoid visiting generally
- ✓ It is premature for CovidCom to consider implementing a total lockdown of our two Frail Care facilities, but it is a distinct possibility that this may happen, and at very short notice. This has already happened in the USA, notably at a facility outside Seattle where at least eighteen elderly residents have succumbed to COVID-19. That facility has been declared “ground zero”, with no visitors being allowed onto the property. We hope and pray that it won’t come to that at MHA or in PE, but CovidCom is making preparations for that eventuality, and this includes communicating with residents’ families and loved ones. To put this potential course of action into perspective, Italy, Spain and France, as countries, are going into total lockdown
- ✓ MHA will closely monitor reports and other output from the WHO, healthcare/disease prevention agencies, and our own national/provincial/local government. MHA will do all it can to be compliant and proactive
- ✓ We must all make preventing the spread of infection a top priority in our daily behaviours. This means frequent and thorough hand washing (or use of a hand sanitizer), covering our coughs and sneezes, and staying home if we're sick (self-quarantining). This is a broad subject, and CovidCom will be issuing frequent bits of information and guidelines to assist with this education process (see below)
- ✓ This letter is being distributed across the entire MHA family other than our two Frail Cares, but it is logistically impossible to do this on a frequent and efficient basis. CovidCom has therefore decided that we will use the MHA website to provide frequent COVID-19 bulletins and updates on what is happening globally, within SA, in PE and, of course, as it affects MHA in any way. We therefore urge those of you who use the internet to frequently visit our website (www.methomes.co.za), and to share the information with those neighbours who don’t have internet access. A copy of any bulletin will be displayed on all available noticeboards, in addition. Via the website, residents’ next of kin will also be able to keep abreast of developments. CovidCom regards clear and frequent communication to all as key, in the weeks ahead
- ✓ CovidCom is also establishing a Support Centre which can be accessed via e-mail. Details will be provided on the website during the course of this week
- ✓ A GP/Infectious Disease Specialist posted this on Facebook (author not identified):
 - Stop waiting to be surprised
 - Temper Fear with Reason/Panic with Patience/Uncertainty with Education
 - Think of others via clean hands and open hearts

We want to close this letter by emphasizing the wisdom shared by that medical practitioner. Across the world there have been isolated incidents of panic (bulk-buying of toilet paper, pasta, sanitizer products, face masks and the like). We urge you to continue your normal daily routines and exercise as far as you are able, but not expose yourself or others to danger. We will deal with this critical issue via the website during the week.

We also urge you all to keep up to date with COVID-19 by watching the news channels available to you, or via the internet, your mobile device or other news media. Don’t wait to be surprised, and do not be swayed by rumours and negative talk. For those of you living independently in a cottage, the onus remains with you to stay informed. It is only by having knowledge of the enemy that one is able to confront and conquer the beast. The MHA Board, Management and staff will march alongside you until the battle is won!

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm Stewart
CovidCom Chairman
(and also signed electronically on behalf of the CovidCom members)