

Nursing Home and Assisted Living Oversight Working Group
Socialization, Visitation and Caregiver Engagement Subcommittee

Meeting Summary

Monday, November 16, 2020 10:00 AM via Zoom

The meeting was convened by Senator Cathy Osten, Subcommittee Co-Chair

1. Historical Perspective on Socialization and Visitation prior to COVID-19

- Subcommittee Co-Chair Mairead Painter reviewed the federal guidance on resident rights. She discussed the right to unimpeded access to individuals of residents' choosing and how residents are affected when long term care facilities have to institute infection control measures that restrict visits.

2. Current Status of Socialization and Visitation Policies

- Ms. Painter reviewed the impact the COVID-19 restrictions are having on residents' access to family, friends and fellow residents, as well as the physical, mental and emotional effects on residents. She discussed the need for long term care facilities to access residents for compassionate care visits should all indoor visits stop, and for facilities to look at staffing needs in order to support the social and emotional needs of residents. Further, she stressed the need to provide supports to residents through the winter months until a vaccine is available or until a plan is in place to allow visitors back in to facilities in an unimpeded way.
- Sen. Osten stated that the subcommittee needed to look at the pre-pandemic visitation issues, as well as the issues associated with the pandemic. Further, she expressed concern about the lack of consumer confidence that exists across sectors.
- Matthew Barrett, President & CEO of the CT Association of Health Care Facilities/CCAL, concurred with Ms. Painter's assessments. Mr. Barrett also drew members' attention to Sandra Arbur's thoughts that were forwarded to subcommittee members (Ms. Arbur was unable to attend the meeting). He discussed the restrictions that were imposed by the Governor in the early

phase of COVID-19 and the lack of understanding of the long term effects of those restrictions on residents. He stated that skilled nursing facilities and assisted living communities have learned much over the many months of dealing with the pandemic and that there is more to learn, such as the use of technology to facilitate visitation.

- Mag Morelli, President of LeadingAge CT, discussed the CMS guidance regarding visitation and the efforts of facilities to interpret the guidance properly. She shared that LeadingAge has encouraged its members to be transparent with residents and to communicate with family members to help them understand the status of visitation practices. She also spoke of the efforts by facilities to create indoor visitation areas, such as installing plexiglass. Lastly, she talked of the level of fear of COVID-19 experienced by residents, families and staff.
- Annette Cochefski, an RN with Brookdale Senior Living Facilities, shared that assisted living facilities are seeing the same kinds of concerns as skilled nursing facilities, especially the mental wellbeing of their residents. She spoke of the efforts of assisted living facilities to balance residents' needs and rights with the safety of facilities as a whole.
- Elizabeth Stern shared the impact that visitation restrictions have had on her family, and the inability of her father, siblings and her to visit her mother before she passed and the trauma that caused her family. She informed members that she has been researching other states' approaches to visitation and that she would be happy to share that information.
- Sen. Osten encouraged Ms. Stern to forward the information she has gathered to Susan Keane, Subcommittee Administrator, who will share that information with the members. She stated that it is important for the subcommittee to look at best practices in other states.
- Rep. McCarty asked that the long term facilities provide information to the subcommittee, as follows:
 1. Please provide the committee with more information concerning the use of technology at the various facilities? Please identify the disparities that may exist and provide some solutions? Are there privacy issues that need to be addressed?
 2. What is the level of social emotional training for staff at nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

3. Please outline what extra measures are taken to meet the mental health and social needs for residents who do not have regular visitation from family members.
 4. Please provide the sub-committee with additional information regarding expanding outdoor visitation such as the purchase of tents.
 5. What is your opinion related to a regional approach depending on community prevalence of COVID to visitation rights of residents?
- Rep. Hughes and Sen. Osten discussed the framework for adding consideration of the fiscal implications of the issues to be examined. Sen. Osten recommended getting a full understanding and articulation of the issues before looking at the costs.
 - Ms. Painter stressed the importance of "meeting people where they're at" concerning the use of technology. She also shared the feedback her office is getting regarding residents' objections to living with restrictive measures.

3. Input from Residents and Families

- Sen. Osten and Ms. Painter discussed inviting residents to participate in the November 23 meeting to share their thoughts and concerns. Ms. Painter will extend invitations to some of the residents with whom she has worked.
- Sen. Osten asked Elizabeth Stern to invite family members to the November 30 meeting to share their perspectives.

4. Standing Meeting Date

- Sen. Osten announced that the subcommittee would meet on Mondays at 10:00 am via Zoom

Seeing no further discussion, Senator Osten adjourned the meeting.

Next Meeting – Monday, November 23, 10 am via Zoom

Appendix A

To: Susan Keane

Subcommittee: Visitation, Socialization and Caregiver Engagement

Date: Sunday, November 15th, 2020

From: Sandra Arburr,

Director of Therapeutic Recreation and Dementia Programming
Athena Health Care Systems

In response to the Agenda items for November 16th, 2020 meeting I have drafted the following:

Visitation: Prior to COVID-19 Visitation of families, friends and loved ones in our Long - Term Care Centers was welcomed and encouraged and took place spontaneously. Visitations were not restricted to areas. Visitors were also encouraged to participate in structured group activities with their loved ones in order to welcome all to be part of the extended facility family as well as to provide the much needed assistance with adjustment to their new surroundings and environment. The ability to have family, friends and loved ones as a present and integral part of our centers was expeditiously important in bridging the gap during time of transition and forward throughout their stay.

Socialization: Prior to COVID-19 Programs and Activities were an opportunity to meet new people with similar interest and build the bond of friendship and companionship. It was an opportunity to participate in lifelong leisure pursuits, fulfill spirituality, remain physically and mentally active and it was the opportunity to explore new hobbies and pastimes. It was celebrating holidays and milestones in the resident's lives including their communal and facility acquired families, friends and loved ones. It was an opportunity to have a voice through our Resident Councils and to provide an opportunity to continue to provide our residents the opportunity to feel the ever important feelings of self-worth and accomplishment through resident volunteer work and a connection to the community.

Socialization and Visitation Prior to COVID-19 were one, if not THE most important factors in maintaining the residents overall well-being and quality of life, As the residents we are entrusted to care for daily have had so much loss and change to their daily routines and their lives we strived through the human connection to maintain the ability to have moment of joy, engagement and meaningfulness not change but continue.

Current Status of Socialization and Visitation Policies:

The current status of the Visitation and Socialization Policies has dramatically changed the daily operations of how we deliver and safely provide the opportunity for meaningful connection and safe social interactions in our Long -Term Care Centers. It has challenged us to look differently at how we can make these connections as safe as possible through technology and additional resources. We have been challenged to change the way we assure our residents maintain an optimal level of social, physical, spiritual and emotional wellbeing. It has impacted our residents, families, friends, loved

ones and staff in a way no one expected. We now provide the bridge to human connection and meaningful milestones through technology and safe practices of in person visitation, virtual visitation and socially distanced activity when able and appropriate. The impact that COVID -19 has impressed upon our operations has been great and has demonstrated the innate need for socialization, human connection and meaningfulness providing proof that there is a direct correlation between social stimulation and the ability to thrive. As we strive daily to do the best we can and protect our residents and provide opportunities for interactions it is of importance to take note that although technology has been of great assistance during these difficult times it cannot replace the human touch and connection.

Legal Authority for Denying Visitation in Nursing Homes:

Legal Authority for Denying Visitation and Movement in Assisted Living Facilities:

Accountability for Quality Emotional and Social Support.