RCGP Northern Ireland and Independent Health and Care Providers joint statement on care homes

The representative body for Northern Ireland’s independent care home sector and RCGP Northern Ireland have today issued a joint statement on behalf of members in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the significant challenges it has placed on those being cared for, and those working within the care home sector during the Coronavirus pandemic.

General practice has adapted the way it provides medical care to patients during this exceptional time, however they are still providing support for care home residents who require a physical face to face assessment. Those with COVID-19 related symptoms will be assessed, remotely in the first instance, and if they require further assessment or treatment, this will be performed by a Covid Centre based GP.

There have now been 3,767 confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 in Northern Ireland and 393 deaths.

According to latest figures from Northern Ireland Statistical and Research Agency (NISRA) of the 393 deaths involving COVID-19 there have been 209 (53.2%) in hospital; 158 (40.2%) in care homes; three (0.8%) in hospices and 23 (5.9%) at residential addresses or other locations.

Dr Laurence Dorman, Chair of RCGP Northern Ireland and Pauline Shepherd CEO of Independent Health & Care Providers said:

“There have always been good relationships between GPs and the care homes that they look after. We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic is incredibly worrying for care home residents and their families, but also for care home staff who continue to provide exceptional care during this time.

“GPs will continue to deliver the same high level of care and support that they have always provided to their patients in care homes. While the initial assessment and some medical advice might be over the telephone, other services will be in person.

“Advance Care Planning is one area that GPs have delivered for many years and we continue to perform this crucial role with care and sensitivity.
“GPs have had to rapidly adapt the way that they deliver clinical care in the last few weeks. The safety of care home residents is very important to GPs, and for that reason, if there are COVID-19 concerns a GP from the nearest Covid Centre would only visit in person where there is a clinical need to do so. This is to reduce the potential risk of bringing any infection into the home.

“If a face to face visit is needed, GPs will wear the appropriate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to protect staff and residents and will adhere to the stringent infection control guidance that the home provides.

“We are aware of new guidance issued by the Northern Ireland Department of Health and the Health Minister Robin Swann on this matter. We welcome the plans to implement more testing of staff and residents and to deliver better PPE training. We are also aware of staffing concerns of the care homes, and this is being progressed with government and connected stakeholders.

“We are committed to continuing to work closely and collaboratively together to ensure that those working on the frontline of health and social care delivery in our community feel safe during this uncertain time and that patients continue to receive the care that they need.”

Ends

The Royal College of General Practitioners is a network of more than 53,000 family doctors working to improve care for patients. RCGP NI represents a network of around 1,400 doctors aiming to improve care for patients. We work to encourage and maintain the highest standards of general medical practice and act as the voice of GPs on education, training, research and clinical standards.

Independent Health and Care Providers (ihcp) is a non-profit making organisation representing private, voluntary, charitable and church affiliated providers of health and social care. The independent sector employs over 30,000 staff across Northern Ireland delivering care to over 15,000 people in care homes and sheltered housing and around 16,000 people in their own homes every week. Services are provided for older people, for vulnerable adults, including those with learning disabilities or mental health problems and for those people with other special needs.

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