



Report on the Impact of Coronavirus/Covid-19 on Care Homes in Redbridge

Follow-on Report July 2020

Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings from our telephone survey conducted between Thursday 25th June and Monday 6th July 2020.

Our survey and the report are not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all care and nursing homes, only an account of the responses received from staff who were willing to contribute confidentially at the time.

Introduction

Ten weeks ago, Healthwatch Redbridge were informed that all patients were being routinely tested for COVID-19 (Coronavirus) before being discharged from hospital. Many individuals were recuperating from COVID-19, some of whom would require nursing or social care support.

Timely discharge needed to happen to ensure the NHS could maintain capacity for acutely ill patients.

We were concerned when it was confirmed that many patients would be discharged into the community without having the results of their COVID test known prior to discharge. We were told that care and nursing homes should ‘treat people returning from hospital as though they had COVID-19’ and to isolate for two weeks within the home.

In May, we conducted an initial telephone survey speaking with 31 local residential and nursing homes to identify whether they had any concerns caused by the pandemic.

This second report carried out in July, is an updated response highlighting any changes in the original report.

We also looked at the accessibility and range of available GP support as an additional area.

Research Objectives

- To understand the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on care and nursing homes in Redbridge.
- To compare and contrast the results from our first survey to understand what might have changed.
- To identify where improvements have happened, and where support is still required.
- To understand how local care and nursing homes have managed the impact of health service changes.

Methodology

HWR planned to contact the same 31 care homes that were involved in the first survey in May. These were a selection of care and nursing homes across Redbridge.

We captured views from care and nursing homes that offered different specialist support: Learning Disability, Mental Health, Dementia, Nursing or Personal Care, Physical/sensory disabilities. The size of homes differed, from those with four beds to those with 105 beds and homes that were based geographically across the borough.

Our aim was to speak to the manager or deputy manager in all cases, but where they were unavailable or unwell; we attempted to call back several times.

In most cases, we spoke with the care home manager. Where this was not possible, we spoke to the deputy manager or a member of staff. Some staff wanted to speak with our volunteers and therefore we accommodated this.

In total, we managed to contact 28 of the original 31 care homes involved in our first report.

Findings

For the purposes of this report, we show the original findings from the May care home review¹, concentrating our questions on the following areas:

1. The number of residents or staff with Covid-19 symptoms
2. The availability and access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
3. How residents are supported within the discharge process (from hospital to care home)
4. The availability of testing within care homes
5. The impact of staff sickness on a care home

We also added a new survey question to identify whether homes felt they had appropriate access to GP and other health support during the pandemic.

Findings are shown in three coloured boxes:

Pink box = Original survey question

Blue box = Updated question

Green box = Comment/contrast/comparison

¹ http://healthwatchredbridge.co.uk/sites/default/files/care_home_report_may_2020.pdf

Covid-19 symptoms in care homes

Original survey question: *Are any of your residents currently exhibiting, or have previously had Covid-19 symptoms?*

Response: A total of 31 (100%) responses were given:

- 14/31 (45%) care homes had residents who are currently exhibiting, or have previously had Coronavirus/Covid-19 symptoms
- 17 (55%) had residents who are currently not exhibiting, or have not previously had Coronavirus/Covid-19 symptoms

Updated question: *Have any of your residents exhibited Covid-19 symptoms since mid-May?*

Response:

A total of 28 (100%) responses were given:

- 28/28 (100%) said they have not had any residents who have exhibited Covid-19 symptoms since mid-May.

Comment/contrast/comparison with first survey:

It was positive to hear that the care homes we spoke with had no further cases of Covid-19, however we have discovered that some staff in care homes have recently tested positive for Covid-19 without showing any symptoms (asymptomatic).

This is a concerning development and will need to be closely monitored.

Personal Protective Equipment

Original survey question: *Are you able to get enough PPE?*

Response: A total of 31 (100%) responses were given:

- 25/31 (81%) care homes said they can get enough PPE
- 6/31 (19%) care homes said they are not able to get enough PPE

Updated question: *Have you been able to access PPE since mid-May?*

Response:

A total of 28 (100%) responses were given:

- 28/28 (100%) said they can now access appropriate levels of PPE
- 11 care homes told us their access to PPE had increased since mid-May
- 16 homes said their access to PPE had remained the same
- 26 homes told us they had enough PPE, however 1 care home told us they felt they did not currently have enough and were running low on masks
- One care home highlighted effective communication between the London Borough of Redbridge and Mencap.

*“Redbridge and Mencap have been great.
We have very good support from them.
Good communication between them and us.*

*The contracts manager calls us every week
to make sure we have everything we need.
We feel well-equipped and safe.”*

- One care home using PPE from the London Borough of Redbridge commented on the quality of the products received.

“Local authority PPE is poorer quality than own suppliers so using more. Thin aprons and poor gloves which often rip.”

- Four care homes commented positively that they are receiving PPE supplies from other stockists quickly.
- One care home told us they have switched from disposable PPE to reusable face masks and visors.

Comment/contrast/comparison with first survey:

Easier access to PPE has increased by 19%. It is reassuring to note that the care homes we spoke to say their access to PPE had either remained the same or increased since mid-May.

This appears to suggest initial stock issues have levelled out.

Some care homes commented that the London Borough of Redbridge have been helpful with supplies of PPE.

“Very happy with supplies, delivered quickly. Redbridge services have been great.”

Discharge

Original survey question: *Have you, or would you accept a resident being discharged from hospital who had tested positive for COVID 19?*

Response:

A total of 28 responses were received:

- 13/28 (46%) care homes said they would accept a Covid positive resident being discharged from hospital who had tested positive for Covid-19
- 15 (54%) care homes said that they would not accept a resident being discharged from hospital who had tested positive for Covid-19

Updated question: *Have you been receiving residents discharged from hospital into your care home?*

Response:

A total of 28 (100%) responses were received:

- 9/28 (32%) care homes said they been receiving residents from hospital
- 19/28 (68%) said they have not received a discharged hospital patient

Supplementary question: *Do you know if these residents have been tested for Covid-19?*

Response:

A total of 8 responses were received:

- 7 (88%) care homes told us they were aware these residents had been tested for Covid-19
- 1 (12%) care home told us that they did not know if the resident had been tested for Covid-19

Supplementary question: *Are these returning or new residents to your care home, or a mix of both?*

Response:

- 4 (50%) were returning residents
- 2 (25%) were new residents
- 2 (25%) were mixtures of returning and new residents

Supplementary question: *Have you had the choice whether to accept Covid-19 positive residents back into your care home?*

Response:

A total of 6 responses were received:

- Four (67%) care homes told us they had the choice whether to accept Covid-19 positive residents back into their care home
- Two (33%) care homes told us they did not know if they had the choice whether to accept Covid-19 positive residents back into their care home (however, these responses may have been received from a junior member of staff and not necessarily the manager)

Comment/contrast/comparison with first survey:

- Two care homes told us they had tested the resident upon their return
- Three homes told us they placed the resident in isolation upon discharge from the hospital
- Two homes told us the hospital had isolated the resident before they were discharged

- Two homes told us that they were full and therefore unable to take any additional residents at the present time
- Two homes told us that, although they have not been asked to take people being discharged from hospital, they would do so if asked

Most care homes that commented they have or would take residents discharged from hospital, have done so with caveats:

- One care home told us they have decided to take just one referral:

“There have been more referrals..... time needed to assess and decide to take just the one. Our priority is our present residents.”

- One home told us they would only accept a resident if they were Covid-19 negative within the last 72 hours
- One told us that although they have not been asked to do so, they would if the resident was isolated within the hospital prior to being discharged
- One commented that they would prefer residents to be Covid-19 negative, but would take them if they were positive
- One manager told us that although a discharge hadn't taken place within their home, they would not have accepted someone who had tested positive, stating:

“It wouldn't be safe. I would have refused.”

Testing

Original survey question: *Have your staff and residents been able to access tests when required?*

Response:

A total of 24 responses were received:

- 16/24 (67%) care homes said staff and residents had been able to access tests when required
- 8/24 (33%) care homes said staff and residents had not been able to access tests when required

One care home told us they were concerned that over 80% of their staff did not drive and were unable to access the drive-through testing centres. They also said there was difficulty accessing hospital sites. The home was awaiting home testing kits.

Of the homes able to access testing:

- 3 (23%) had tests carried out in the home
- 2 (15%) used hospital testing facilities
- 8 (62%) used the drive through testing centre

Updated Question: *Have your staff or residents been able to access tests since mid-May?*

Response:

A total of 28 (100%) responses were received:

- 27/28 (96%) said they were now able to access testing
- 1/28 (4%) home told us they had not been able to access testing

Comment/contrast/comparison with first survey:

It was clear from the newer responses that care homes are finding it easier to access regular testing. Most homes (96%) felt access to testing had improved (80%) or remained the same (16%).

When asked where tests were being carried out, 26 homes responded and told us the tests were being completed within the care home itself. Three homes were also accessing testing centres.

Some concerns were raised regarding [home] testing kits.

- Five care homes told us about faulty testing kits:

“Tests done for staff and residents in last 4 weeks, but no results received back. Next kit received; the swab was recalled. Third kit just received.”

“We received kits two weeks ago and then were told they were faulty - we received an email and were told to check the reference number and it matched our kit. We were told to discard it. We have received a new kit and are following guidance from the Department of Health regarding testing.”

- Four (14%) care homes raised concerns regarding the difficulty of testing their residents who have learning or physical disabilities

“It is difficult testing residents with disabilities, they find it stressful....

..... Once they have had it done once, some feel that subsequent testing is like a punishment, as they hate it....

..... Difficult to explain the importance of it to them.”

- One home told us they had technical difficulties with the webinar that was offered to explain how to take the tests as they could not hear the sound
- One home told us there was sometimes a delay between the swabs being taken and collection of specimens
- Another home told us there had sometimes been delays with admitting someone into the care home as there were delays with testing in the community

Other homes reported no issues with the testing process.

“It’s so much easier to get testing done since we’ve been receiving test kits. Just sent one lot off yesterday. Sending a second one off very soon.”

- One care home wanted to carry out antibody testing. *We provided the home with the latest updated antibody testing information.*

Whilst, it is positive to see that access to testing has improved, there remain serious concerns regarding the efficacy of the testing.

Staff Sickness

Original survey question: *Are any staff currently off sick with COVID-19 symptoms?*

Response: Response:

We received 29 (94%) responses to this question:

- 10/29 (34%) care homes told us they currently have staff off sick with Covid-19 symptoms
- 19/29 (66%) homes said they do not currently have staff off sick with Covid-19 symptoms

Comment:

Of the ten care homes who told us they currently have staff off sick, nine also had residents who also had Covid-19 symptoms and four had residents who had died.

Updated question: *Have any staff been off sick with Covid-19 symptoms since mid-May?*

Response:

A total of 28 A total of 27 responses were received:

- 2/27 (7%) care homes told us that they have had staff off sick with Covid-19 symptoms since mid-May
- 25/27 (93%) care homes told us that they have not had staff off sick with Covid-19 symptoms since mid-May

Supplementary question: *What impact has this had on your care home?*

Response:

Three care homes told us their staff were working extra hours to cover the staff who are off sick or shielding. No care homes are using agency staff.

Comment/contrast/comparison with first survey:

The pressure of staff sickness due to Covid-19 has decreased by 27%, although some homes were still concerned about the workload of other staff who are stepping up to support.

“Two staff members had symptoms and self-isolated for two weeks. We are sharing more of the workload between everyone. There is more pressure.”

Access to GP support

Additional survey question: *Have you had access to GPs during the Covid-19 pandemic?*

Response:

A total of 27 responses were received:

- 26/27 (96%) care homes told us that they have had access to GPs during the pandemic

Supplementary question: *How have you accessed your GP? what format has this access taken place?*

Response:

A total of 27 responses were received:

- 19/27 (70%) care homes accessed their GPs by phone
- 12/27 (44%) homes accessed their GP online
- 5/27 (19%) accessed their GP in person

Some care homes accessed GP services using a combination of methods. Some were in regular weekly contact, using a range of methods (phone, online and in person).

Some homes preferred face to face engagement and a few GP's were offering this service:

“He [GP] comes once a week to see the residents, he’s very good.”

“The GP, staff and residents prefer the personal aspect of the GPs visit. He comes in quite often”

One care home commented that after some issues with using video links, they had decided to only use telephone consultations.

Another home told us they had tried unsuccessfully to request a GP home visit.

Supplementary question: *Have you requested a GP home visit during the pandemic?*

Response

A total of 28 (100%) care homes responded to this question.

- 16/28 (64%) care homes told us that they have not required a GP to visit during Covid-19. Five of these homes told us that they believed a GP would visit if requested to do so
- Two homes told they had other NHS services visit separately during the pandemic; an ambulance and a nurse (not Covid-19 related)

“We had a patient with chronic problems so asked GP to come. She also checked other residents with minor problems. Minor issues have been sorted out over the phone.”

“GP saw a resident that suffers from epilepsy and was told that the resident needed to go to Queen’s Hospital. He was OK - no admittance needed. The staff have hospital passports, so that that they can accompany residents that have to go to hospital.”

- One care home told us that they requested a GP to visit, but the GP did not.

“Patient at risk of aspiration, G.P. would only give advice on phone.”

Further comments

Supplementary question: *Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the impact of Coronavirus/Covid-19 on your care home since mid-May?*

Response

Several care homes told us about changes they had made within the home due to Covid-19. Changes ranged from restricting short-term placements, visiting arrangements, and creating a range of new activities:

“The Coronavirus has made us organise a wide variety of activities for the residents to take part in, to keep their spirits up e.g. Latin American dancing; pretend cruise days (tables with food from around the world), videos.”

Some homes told us that they were “managing ok”, with a further two telling us that they were “coping well”.

Some homes spoke about the effect of Covid-19 on their staff with one commenting on the particular effect on staff’s mental health.

“Covid has had and is still having an impact on everyone’s mental health. Staff and management are having to deal with the constant change of recommendations. This has increased stress and anxiety for staff and some staff have been off sick with anxiety. Having to prepare for worse case scenarios.”

The same care home commented positively that staff have coped well, despite this stress and anxiety.

“Really pleased with staff. Everybody has showed up and everybody has shined.”

They further shared with us the support that has been put in place by the management to support the staff team which included an “open-door policy” so that staff know they could come and talk if they needed to. The manager was trained in coaching and able to provide support.

Some homes shared their concerns for their residents, particularly the impact of family contacts:

“It is obvious that it is impacting on the staff, as they are concerned about the effect it’s having on the residents not being able to see their families.”

Guidance has caused some confusion:

“Clients are getting confused with the messages given, e.g. some shops are open, others are going to open. They [residents] are not getting their heads around social distancing. We are having lots of conversations.”

A care home shared concerns around risks to vulnerable residents. They explained how some of their residents exhibited risky behaviour in “normal” times such as begging cigarettes from people and how this behaviour

could now put them at even more at risk in the current situation.

Support from statutory organisations has been emphasised:

“It was quite scary, trying to keep residents safe from the Covid virus - the residents are so vulnerable. But we now have such good support from Redbridge Council, and the CQC inspector visits regularly. This really helps us to feel safe, and not forgotten.”

Working with the care homes

Over the last five months, care homes have had to work incredibly hard to continue to provide a safe and supportive environment to their residents during unprecedented conditions.

It is a credit to them that, since the completion of this review of the initial survey, we can clearly see they are addressing issues and continuing to care for their residents as safely as they can.

We have continued to identify and voice any concerns raised by our local homes' through our relationships with Redbridge Council, Public Health Redbridge, Clinical Commissioning Groups, and NHS trusts.

We will continue to liaise with the care homes in the borough and highlight any further support they may require.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Redbridge (HWR) would like to thank the care and nursing staff and managers who contributed to this survey.

We would also like to thank our volunteers without whom we would not have been able to complete the report as quickly as we have

Healthwatch Redbridge

103 Cranbrook Road

Ilford, Essex

IG1 4PU

020 8553 1236

info@healthwatchredbridge.co.uk

www.healthwatchRedbridge.co.uk