



August 17, 2020

Sent by E-Mail

Ms. Seema Verma
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Administrator Verma:

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of mission-driven nursing homes across the nation. I appreciate that your office reached out to let me know in advance to invite LeadingAge's 2,000 nursing home members to the webinar you hosted this past Thursday, August 13.

LeadingAge members understand that you recognize that older people, particularly those living in congregate residential settings, are at elevated risk of developing serious, even life-threatening illness if they contract coronavirus infection. As you noted on the webinar, we face an immediate crisis and must do all we can to mitigate and address it.

I want to assure you, LeadingAge's nursing home members stand fully with you on the need to ensure that all nursing home residents are afforded the highest quality of health care, safety, and quality of life. However, we heard a few concerns and questions from members that I would very much like to discuss with you and see if we can identify constructive solutions.

LeadingAge's nursing home members understand the "strike teams," comprised of CMS, Public Health Service, and CDC clinicians, are intended to provide expert assessments of what they observe in the nursing homes they visit, followed with immediate suggestions on how to improve. We have long advocated such a collaborative, non-punitive approach to quality. With 40% of COVID deaths occurring in nursing homes, it is more important than ever that problems that can be addressed immediately, in real time, be taken care of.

All of our members understand the basic need for hand washing, proper donning and doffing of PPE, and screening staff entering the nursing home for symptoms. Every staff person in every nursing home has been trained in the basics of infection prevention. Members who called into the webinar were hoping the "strike team" feedback would cover these basics but also go deeper into more complex issues such as:

- How nursing homes, particularly single site non-investor owned organizations running on narrow margins, can afford testing supplies and ongoing testing – the HHS-provided point of care testing machines will help, but test kits and staffing are still a problem.
- What the experts recommend when nursing homes are struggling to secure the PPE they need to protect staff and residents.

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- How nursing homes in states where surveyors are not required to be tested prior to entering nursing homes can protect residents and staff from infection.
- When there are issues with basic hygiene, exactly what are the circumstances – for example, are hand washing and proper use of PPE an issue in resident care, in break rooms, or elsewhere? How can solutions be targeted to the precise situations and places in which they are needed?
- As states ease up on visitor restrictions, what do strike team experts observe and how can concerns be addressed?

Dr. Fleisher mentioned a few things on the webinar on which our members asked for clarification.

First, he said that if a nursing home does not have onsite infection prevention, its leaders should develop relationships locally with infection prevention experts. Did the strike teams visit nursing homes that did not comply with this regulatory requirement?

Second, Dr. Fleisher suggested that staff who are asymptomatic not be permitted back into the nursing home until they test negative for COVID. This is inconsistent with CDC return to work guidance.

Finally, Dr. Fleisher suggested that strike teams are watching for staffing shortages. This has been a long-standing concern for all long-term care providers. Nursing home members welcome any advice or guidance from experts on how to address this challenge, particularly as it has been exacerbated by the pandemic. CMS is a welcome partner for nursing homes seeking to address the staffing crisis. This would be a well-received topic for a future webinar.

When we spoke in the late spring, you generously said you would be available to talk about concerns raised by LeadingAge members. I look forward to a call with you to discuss these issues and provide thoughts about strike team activity going forward.

May we contact Meredith Good-Cohn to set up a time to talk?

Sincerely,



Katie Smith Sloan
President and CEO

cc: Meredith Good-Cohn
Diana Perez-Rivera