

Last Saturday, I read a speech given to me from health care professionals. This week I speak for myself and David, as advocates for residents, families and carers in long term facilities. My Mother has spent the last decade in long term care here in Edmonton. I am connected with families who would welcome the opportunity to share their stories with the media. I have residents who've actually asked to protest! I am talking to HCA's who are struggling with what they see happening to those in long term care but who, like the nurses I spoke of last week, have been threatened if they speak out. Has anyone covered these stories in the media?

I've always said if we can address what is happening in care homes, we can resolve this crisis for us all. Yes, this population is at risk from COVID19. They are and always have been from any ILI (Influenza like illness). But people need to understand the actual toll in terms of suffering and death for these poor souls is the direct result of the protocols that have been put in place FOR this virus.

The first total lockdown for residents lasted three months – from March to May this year. For those twelve weeks, not a single visitor was allowed in the building. Even the primary care physicians have had to fight to get in to see their own patients. When Deena Hinshaw finally eased restrictions, ONE family member only was given access for essential visits. The physical and mental deterioration that families saw when they were finally allowed in was, in many cases, horrendous and heartbreaking. We have worked with six families including our own in just this one centre to shed light on the plight of those in care. This is happening in care homes all across North America. Please note that what I am about to tell you does NOT in any way reflect poorly on the carers who are angels in this storm. We level all blame for this crisis on Deena Hinshaw, AHS and the Care organizations who have woefully failed in their duty of care. The very measures they have put in place which they claim are to “protect” the most vulnerable are, in fact, killing them.

In the past, outbreaks were managed with tried and tested infection controls, just as they were in hospitals. But now life in care is nothing more than existence. These poor souls are prisoners just waiting to die. My Mum's care home was locked down again a week ago. This is the now the 4th lockdown since March. Each lockdown lasts anything from 4-6 weeks. Each lockdown has been the result of a few staff "testing positive from asymptomatic tests". To date, residents and staff have endured 15 rounds of testing. Only in the last month have there been resident "cases" with one death. Remember, though, we are in ILLI season. It is a sad fact that every year under normal circumstances, deaths occur for those most compromised. Bear in mind also that a lockdown in my Mother's care home, for example, impacts 1000 people between residents, families and staff. Each lockdown has irreversible, devastating effects, physically and emotionally, on the residents.

This is what lockdown looks like for residents. They are not allowed to leave the centre at all except for "essential trips" (effectively a hospital appointment). The same two people are allowed to visit in their room ONLY, wearing full PPE at all times. Be it family or staff, these residents haven't seen a recognizable face since March. Residents eat, one to a table, segregated, their tables six feet apart. The only sound in the dining room is the clink of cutlery on plates. The silence is soul searing. The staff move between them to help, again without a word. What was a happy home, where laughter was infectious, is now gone. Hopelessness is the real virus. Residents are allowed physio but only if alone. They have no recreational activities. They have no access to spiritual support. They have no access to treatments, services or activities which give their already limited lives pleasure and meaning (extended family, outings, massage, hair appointments, social interaction, visiting entertainers, the list is endless). Many see little of their family at the best of times. With restricted access and families convinced they'll kill their loved ones if they visit, these sad souls are left bereft. Residents are suffering and dying – not from this virus – but from loneliness and lack of care.

I've now been told my Mum can't come to us for Christmas. This is despite COVID "cases" in the facility. If COVID is her greatest risk, then my home is actually safer! Yet my Mum has to remain in a care home where she is most at risk.

Carers tell me they are overwhelmed, working double shifts 7am -11pm because two week isolations, when anyone shows a symptom or is a close contact, are leaving them short staffed. Their jobs are made twice as difficult by the continuous use of PPE. They are suffering from headaches, tiredness, and dizziness, unable to see properly from the glare from the visors. These working conditions, against OH&S standards, put carers and residents at risk. Carers are exhausted, burnt out, fearful and demoralized. We have evidence that resident care is being adversely affected: medication carts are being left unattended, hygiene and wound care is being neglected, residents are not getting the help they need to eat at mealtimes, floors are dirty, beds are left soiled, call bells are left ringing too long, residents are being put to bed early and left in bed late. There are residents with pressure sores causing infections down to the bone in four cases that we know of, caused by lack of care. One such infection involves a 90 year old lady whose leg now requires amputation. She has been given a death sentence. ALL this is the direct result of lack of care from the protocols in place for COVID19. Residents are physically declining from hours of inactivity. I see utter anguish on the faces of residents from hours of isolation and separation from those they love. I will say again...THIS IS NOT IN ANY WAY THE FAULT OF THE FRONTLINE STAFF who are going above and beyond, as they always have, to do the best for those in their care. Protection from our government has become cruel and unusual punishment.

With endless rounds of symptoms now we are in winter and relentless testing, this will be lockdown in perpetuity. This is not erring on the side of caution. This is incarceration in the guise of care. We have refused COVID testing on my Mother. Why? AHS themselves have admitted that these tests

cannot be used to infer an infection. So why test? We have also put in writing that no changes are to be made to her medications without our INFORMED CONSENT. Please remember those two words. INFORMED CONSENT. Capital Care only revised their correspondence with families on this AFTER we called them out on it. This week, families were notified that non-essential medications were being temporarily stopped to save staff resources. This includes Calcium and Vitamin D. So, who decided these medications are non-essential? Why the very ones that would boost the immune system?

I state with absolute certainty and am prepared to give evidence in court that what is happening in care homes is nothing less than provincially and medically sanctioned neglect. Note: all MLA's, MP's, Patient Advocate Janice Harrington, Jason Kenney and Deena Hinshaw have been notified of these facts but fail to act.

To anyone who supports hard lock downs for care centres. Particularly to Jason Kenney and Deena Hinshaw, I have a proposition for you. Spend your next two weeks in my Mother's care home under the conditions you have recommended. Confined to one room. Confined to a wheelchair. Confined over Christmas. When care becomes cruelty and safety imprisonment, there is no reason left to live. I leave you with an enduring quotation:

“The true measure of any society can be seen in how it treats its most vulnerable members”