

Ombudsman

L O N G T E R M C A R E
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COVID-19 Guidance from SLTCO March 16, 2020

- **In conformance with CMS guidance re: Visits** – for now, **no routine visits** at any facility (Nursing Homes (NH), Personal Care Homes (PCH), Assisted Living Communities (ALC)). Complaint visits, only if necessary.
- **Volunteer visiting** – no volunteer visiting at any facility for the time being – for the safety of the visitors and the safety of residents.
- **Ombudsman Representative (OR) Staff – visiting, complaint work** –
 - As much as possible, do complaint work over the phone or Skype or other means.
 - Tell all complainants and residents that it will probably not be possible to keep their complaints confidential during this time of restricted visiting.
 - Compassionate care is not defined in the current guidance from CMS. If you believe a complaint needs to be addressed in-person, call the facility administrator or person in charge to tell him or her that you want to visit on a complaint and that you believe an in-person visit is necessary. If you run into a problem with the facility, call the State Ombudsman. It may be that we can resolve the situation, or we may need to request assistance from HFR.
- **Completing Routine visits for the current quarter** - A question has been raised whether calling the resident council president and several other residents (at least 4-5) could qualify as a routine visit. For purposes of completing outstanding routine visits you may do that **for the current quarter only** - that includes January through March.
- **What is happening locally** –
 - What to do for residents who have pending transfer/discharges. HFR was consulted whether these issues would be suspended. HFR says that facilities are not prohibited from issuing transfer/discharges. Transfers/discharges should be treated in the usual way, that is if the resident wants to appeal, be sure to help them appeal the discharge in a timely way.

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- Complaints may come in that the ORs believe require an in-person visit. For example, a resident who is hard of hearing (so using the telephone is not a reasonable option) may have medical concerns such as UTI or hallucinations, could be a situation that the OR thinks an in-person visit is necessary. ORs should call NH, before traveling there, to confirm that NH will let OR visit. If the facility says it will not allow the visit, contact HFR about whether they will go in on the complaint, or what help they can give us to get into the facility.
- Family councils – if they plan to meet, try to participate by phone or over Skype while current guidance is to avoid gatherings.
- If ORs go to a facility, expect to go through the COVID-19 screening. If a facility requests that the OR sign a form related to the visit and/or screening, it is permissible to sign.
- If possible, reschedule activities that have been scheduled for March, or determine alternate means for completing the activities, such as using webinars or conference calls when appropriate.
- **Weekly activity** – please check in with the administrator of each facility and resident council president or other capable resident each week. Document what the current situation is as related by each.
- **Weekly conference calls among GA SLTCOP staff** – to share experiences, strategies and advocacy opportunities.
- **Requests to confirm reports** - Now that COVID-19 is in many Georgia counties, you may encounter general questions about it. For example, you may be asked whether it is in facilities in your area, has anyone in a facility died from it, what are facilities doing about it, and more.
 - Direct all inquiries to the proper authorities including the CDC, Georgia Department of Public Health, local public health, local emergency management, facility staff, or others.
 - For example, if a family member calls and asks if COVID 19 is in a facility in your area, please ask them to call the facility to find out. If a caller asks whether a resident died of COVID 19, please tell them to check with the local health department for that information. We do not want to provide unconfirmed or incorrect information.