

COVID-19

INFORMATION UPDATE



April 19, 2020

To: Executive Directors & Physician Leads of Interior Divisions of Family Practice, Long Term Care Physicians, and IH Regional Medical Directors for Long Term Care

From: Dr. Douglas Smith, Executive Medical Director, Long Term Care, Palliative and End of Life Care, Medical Assistance in Dying and Clinical Informatics

Re: COVID-19 Long-Term Care and Client Transfers

Long-term Care (LTC) facilities are at high risk for spread of COVID-19 and related severe outcomes for residents.

From a clinical perspective, there is benefit for LTC residents to be treated in place when they get COVID-19. In fact, given the level of frailty of LTC residents, it may likely be detrimental for them to be in an acute care environment.

All health regions in British Columbia are making preparations to care for their residents in LTC during the COVID-19 response. The main priority is to ensure high standards of clinical care for our residents to ensure safe and appropriate care is provided.

Provincial Health Officer Orders for LTC

On March 27, 2020, Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry issued an order to LTC facility operators to take significant measures to minimize risk for exposure through:

- Enhanced cleaning,
- Enhanced surveillance for illness by symptom screening of residents, staff, contractors and visitors; **reducing movement of residents within and between facilities**; and restricting visitors to the facility,
- Reporting to the Medical Health Officer (MHO) or delegate immediately any new incidence of one case of influenza-like illness or two cases of mild respiratory illness (RI).

Additionally, on April 10, 2020, Dr. Henry and Health Minister Adrian Dix announced an order designed to reduce and contain potential spread of COVID-19 in LTC and assisted living environments.

The order – [Health Care Staff Designation – April 10, 2020](#) – restricts staff in LTC and assisted living to working at a single site. This means employees who currently hold positions at two or more LTC and/or assisted living facilities will be provided with a new schedule that limits their work to one facility only. The order applies to health authority sites as well as facilities operated by private providers. Implementation of this order is currently in progress, with communications being sent to Long Term Care and Assisted Living facilities this week. Staff whose schedules will be impacted will receive information directly as the implementation is phased in.

Interior Health MHO Requirements for Patient/Resident Inter-Facility Transfers

Subsequent to these two provincial orders, Interior Health MHOs have released [Medical Health Officer Requirements for Patient/Resident Inter-Facility Transfers](#) (Memo and clinical decision pathway hyperlinked for your reference). This memo and clinical decision pathway provides clear guidance with regard to all inter-facility transfers of patients/residents between LTC and acute care facilities. Please review these documents and follow the guidelines and MHO requirements as indicated.

LTC Facility “House Physicians”

While physicians, as essential care providers, are currently exempt from the Provincial Health Officer order relating to staff working at a single LTC facility, Interior Health (IH) recognizes the benefits of minimizing physician visits between LTC facilities to reduce potential risks of transmission of COVID-19. Many IH LTC facilities have identified a “House Physician” for each facility, who may act as Most Responsible Practitioner (MRP) for the residents at that facility should an outbreak occur.

Physicians providing care within LTC facilities are asked to please be aware of the facility for which you are designated as “House Physician,” and ensure your availability to support the care of residents within that facility, by phone, in-person, or [virtual care](#) as needed (every LTC home has iPads/tablets to support virtual care).

Where a “House Physician” model has not yet been identified in your area, you are encouraged to work with your Division of Family Practice, IH Regional Medical Director for LTC and LTC leadership to explore options which can be supported within your region to minimize exposure risks for the residents within your facilities (see contact information for medical directors below).

Provision of Care within LTC Facilities

LTC facility staff have been working to enhance their ability to provide care in place for their residents wherever possible by taking the following measures:

- Reviewing and implementing IH MHO Requirements for Patient/Resident Inter-Facility Transfers,
- Reviewing clinical resources that support the Clinical Decision Pathway for COVID-19 in LTC Residents,
- Reviewing and documenting Medical Orders for Scope of Treatment (MOST) status for all residents,
- Identifying additional equipment/supplies required to support enhanced provision of care within the facility,
- Awareness that they must contact the MRP or facility “House Physician” for consultation prior to requesting a transfer.

LTC Physicians – Your Role in Reducing Non-Essential Transfers

All physicians who are MRP to residents of LTC facilities are asked to consider the following to help support provision of care in place, and ensure only medically appropriate inter-facility transfer of clients:

- Provide available or call coverage phone numbers to LTC facilities,
- Be available to respond to calls regarding your patients as quickly as possible,
- Be familiar with the guidelines provided regarding LTC resident/patient inter-facility transfers,
- Use sound clinical judgement to request only appropriate transfers to ensure client care while minimizing risk,
- Attend the LTC facilities for which you are MRP or “House Physician,” either virtually or in-person as most appropriate, to provide necessary clinical care for residents as needed,

- Notify the MHO of all transfers, and seek MHO approval for non-urgent transfers by calling 1-866-457-5648,
- Communicate with a physician at the receiving facility prior to transfer.

COVID-19 Medical Health Officer Delegate LTC Transfer Advisors

As per the Provincial Health Officer order to reduce movement of residents between facilities, and given the guidance provided by the Interior Health MHOs regarding inter-facility transfers, IH is currently exploring options for a physician-supported COVID-19 MHO Delegate LTC Transfer Advisors program to support clinical decision making around appropriate transfer of clients between LTC and acute care facilities in a safe and effective manner during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Currently the MHOs are functioning solely in this capacity. Consideration of physicians acting in the MHO Delegate capacity remains in the planning stages and would be implemented only where call volumes to the MHO for LTC client transfer approvals increase significantly to where they would exceed the MHOs' capacity to respond in a timely manner.

Long-Term Care Tabletop Exercises

A tabletop exercise was completed on April 8, 2020, with representatives from IH Long-Term Care, Patient Transport, and 911/BC Ambulance Services to review various LTC client transfer scenarios and refine related algorithms.

Additional tabletop exercises to explore COVID-19 response in LTC are currently being coordinated. Lessons learned will continue to inform our COVID-19 response in LTC.

Grand Rounds: COVID-19 Response in Long-Term Care

Grand Rounds will be held April 30, 2020, exploring the physician's role in supporting care for residents in LTC during COVID-19, and key considerations for appropriate inter-facility transfer of residents. A meeting invite will be sent out shortly.

Speakers will include:

- Dr. Doug Smith, Executive Medical Director, LTC, Palliative and End of Life Care, MAiD
- Dr. Silvina Mema, Medical Health Officer
- Karyn Morash, Executive Director, Seniors Specialized Care Transformation
- Brent Hobbs, Network Director, Patient Transportation Services
- Dr. Trevor Janz, Regional Medical Director LTC, IH East

Any Questions?

Should you have questions, please send them to medicalstaff@interiorhealth.ca.

Regional Medical Directors, Long-Term Care Contact Information

IH Region	Medical Director for LTC	Phone	Email
IH East	Dr. Trevor Janz	250-352-1208	Trevor.Janz@interiorhealth.ca
IH West	Dr. Janet Bates	778-257-0365	Janet.Bates@interiorhealth.ca
IH Central	Dr. Diana Peters	250-549-2722	DianaPeters@yahoo.com