
Subject: Medical Directors Annual Report 2020 – Long Term Care Homes

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 13, 2021

Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the 2020 Annual Reports submitted by the Medical Directors of Niagara Region's eight long-term care homes.
- Under the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007, each home is required to have a Medical Director, who must be a physician. The Medical Director fulfills a number of functions including liaising with the Director of Resident Care on matters related to medical care in the home, and serving as a member of Medical Advisory Committee. Medical Directors review and provide input into medical and clinical policies based on best practices. They also ensure 24/7 medical coverage for the home and residents and oversee the Attending Physicians in their home.
- The pandemic has had a significant impact on long-term care homes and the considerations and recommendations from the Medical Directors arise from the unique circumstances COVID-19 presented.

Financial Considerations

As per the Long-Term Care Homes Act and the Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC) Level-of-Care Per Diem funding policy, Medical Directors are issued a payment through the Nursing and Personal Care envelope.

Analysis

Annually, the Medical Directors (MD) of each home complete a review of the prior year's data and provide insight into the trends and changes they observe in their respective home.

The Significant Impact of COVID-19 on Residents in Long-Term Care Homes

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on residents of long-term care homes. Most residents are frail seniors with multiple underlying health conditions and as such they are particularly vulnerable to this virus. Adding to their challenges, very few residents in long-term care homes can tolerate wearing a mask. A large proportion of residents have a diagnosis of dementia and are unable to follow physical distancing guidelines. It is also very difficult to ensure continued isolation among this population when they are restricted to their room due to contact and droplet precautions.

Implications: Staff in full personal protective equipment are providing care for residents who are not wearing any personal protective equipment. Care requires close, sustained contact within resident's bedrooms, increasing the risk of exposure for both the resident and front-line staff. Staff are required to fully don and doff their personal protective equipment as they move from room to room. Additional staffing is required to afford the extra time required for frequent, and safe donning and doffing, the enhanced work to support physical distancing of residents, and ongoing efforts to encourage residents in isolation to remain in their rooms.

COVID-19 Treatment Options

The Medical Directors report that although there are care pathways to treat symptoms, there has not been an acceptable treatment for patients once exposed or infected with COVID-19.

Implications: Managing resident safety throughout the pandemic focuses on mitigating the risk of transmission. Enhanced disinfecting of high touch surfaces, ongoing staff training, diligent active screening of anyone entering the home, and ongoing surveillance of residents through twice daily active screening help to support early detection and prompt isolation of potential COVID-19 cases. A significant contributing complication to effective early detection of COVID-19 is asymptomatic virus transmission.

Staffing Levels

The pandemic has again highlighted the previously identified need for increased staffing. Niagara Region long-term care homes that had COVID-19 outbreaks brought in additional Nurse Practitioner resources to ensure enhanced resident assessment and care planning support. Personal Support Worker (PSW), Registered Nurse (RN),

Registered Practical Nurse (RPN) and housekeeping staffing were also increased to support the significantly increased workload of providing care and services in an outbreak. Future increases in staffing will be instrumental in ensuring that staff are equipped to address increases in resident acuity. The homes will require the ability to increase full-time positions to ensure sustained staff cohorting practices.

Implications: In response to staffing concerns highlighted by the pandemic, the province has committed to increasing front-line PSW, RPN and RN staffing to four hours of care per resident per day. Staffing will increase, in line with funding increases, over the next four years. The Medical Directors encourage expediting this increase in staffing if possible.

Medical Care and Virtual Resources

Medical Directors have access to a number of virtual resources to support the ability to provide care remotely. Remote access to the residents' electronic medical record is available through Point Click Care, and Zoom for Health Care Providers supports secure communication. Medical Directors and Attending Physicians also have access to further virtual tools including the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) and Clinical Connect tools that afford remote access to acute care records. Seniors Services continues to pursue further virtual tools and are currently trialing an e-consult program at one site, prior to rolling it out across all eight homes.

Implications: Throughout 2020 Medical Directors and Attending Physicians have increased their use of virtual resources to support medical care. The medical team will build on this learning to leverage virtual tools that contribute to better and more timely resident care and support.

The impact of COVID-19 on long-term care homes will be the subject of studies for years to come. Lessons learned from this analysis will help to support enhanced infection prevention and control measures in future.

The Medical Directors commented that the past year has been an unprecedented one and will hopefully not recur in the near future. Long-term care homes were significantly challenged by the demands of care at the onset of the pandemic. The administration and front-line staff should be commended for their dedication and continuous efforts in providing the best care for the residents and their families during a difficult and demanding year.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not Applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Healthy and Vibrant Community

Other Pertinent Reports

- COM 10-2020 Medical Directors Annual Report 2019 – Long-Term Care Homes

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