



December 4, 2020

Message to Duncaster Residents and Families

Michael A. O'Brien, President and CEO

This week has been a roller coaster of emotions. The news of the pending vaccine and its promise brought great excitement. The news of the rise in positive cases is alarming. On Thursday, Connecticut reported its highest positivity rate (7.1%) since the end of May, and nursing homes are experiencing increases in infections and deaths.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is scheduled to go before an advisory group for the FDA on December 10th and expected to be approved a few days later. The Moderna vaccine is scheduled to go before the advisory group on December 17th and is also expected to be approved a few days later.

Yesterday the Connecticut DPH announced that the first doses of COVID-19 vaccine are expected to arrive mid-December. As soon as the state receives its doses, the first wave of vaccinations (Phase 1-A) will occur from mid-December to January 25th. We understand at this moment that Phase 1-A will include our staff and our nursing home and Assisted Living residents. We have chosen CVS as our vaccine provider for our residents and staff. The second wave is scheduled to begin in late January. As more details are worked out, I will provide you with the distribution plan. I should also note that what we have learned throughout the pandemic is that everything is fluid and can change at a moments' notice.

Educating our staff and residents on the safety and efficacy of the vaccine will be critical to a successful vaccination program. In collaboration with Hartford HealthCare we will be developing ongoing education programs for our staff and residents. Education begins next week and our goal is to provide factual information so that staff and residents can make informed decisions. The leadership team is also developing a staggered plan for employee vaccine administration, including a plan to track and report any symptoms after the vaccine.

Today we learned that two staff members at Caleb Hitchcock Health Center have tested positive for COVID-19 from the testing that was done on Wednesday. Both staff members are quarantined at home and doing well. Once this news was received, we conducted contact tracing and administered a rapid test for all our residents. I am grateful to report that all residents have tested negative. A PCR test will be conducted for all staff and residents next Wednesday, December 9th.

Per DPH guidelines we are again in outbreak mode at the Caleb Hitchcock Health Center due to staff members testing positive. Unfortunately, this means we need to suspend all indoor visitations that we had initiated earlier this week. We will resume working with residents and their families for virtual visitations.

There was a thought provoking article in today's New York Times entitled "*How 700 Epidemiologists Are Living Now, and What They Think Is Next*". Three-quarters of respondents said they planned to spend Christmas, Hanukkah or other winter holidays only with members of their household, or not celebrate at all, similar to how they spent Thanksgiving. The article further states that "indoor venues with lots of people is the riskiest situation and outdoors with few people, social distancing and precautions is the least risky." Informative and worth reading.

All trends indicate that we will continue to see a rise in positivity rates in the coming weeks due by and large to the gatherings of families and friends over Thanksgiving. With that knowledge, let's remember how far we have come since March. Let's continue to be vigilant, follow the guidelines and be extra cautious. We know what to do. Let's stay strong and continue to do all that we can to mitigate the spread of the virus.

Be well and be safe.