

8 September 2020

Mr Brett Holmes
General Secretary NSWNMA
Branch Secretary ANMF NSW Branch
Via Email: gensec@nswnma.asn.au



Mr Chris Friend
Bargaining Officer
HSU NSW-ACT-QLD
Via Email: chris.friend@hsu.asn.au

Dear Brett and Chris,

RE: Outcomes of Peak Level Meetings on Bupa's COVID-19 Prevention Strategy

Thank you for confirming actions and outcomes from our consecutive meetings of 17 August 2020.

This correspondence is in reply both to the letter of 28 August 2020 from the NSWNMA, and to the email from the HSU on 20 August 2020.

Thank you to you each for your patience as we have collated a comprehensive response to the issues raised.

From the outset; Bupa continues to proactively address any concerns our employees may have regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on their health, wellbeing and employment. There is naturally a heightened focus on the safety and wellbeing of our employees and residents. We continue to closely monitor the Government's health advice (at both Federal and State/Territory level), and will adjust our operations as this advice evolves, with the welfare of our people and residents at the forefront of our considerations.

With this in mind, we note that several matters identified in your letter were of a general nature - we take these concerns very seriously. In the event either union is in receipt of feedback related to a specific site, we ask that this be forwarded to the relevant site General Manager in the first instance. Once received, we will immediately assess the feedback, and where appropriate, make necessary adjustments to ensure the safety and comfort of our employees.

With respect to the matters raised in the correspondence:

1. COVID-19 Protocols

Please find attached to this letter a copy of the relevant COVID-19 related protocols.

You have indicated that you have received reports that there have been exceptions to facility lockdown protocols. We have implemented our protocols to ensure consistency of practice, however we note that exceptions are sometime warranted based upon specific circumstances. We would appreciate you providing additional detail so that we may immediately investigate the issue.

We remain committed to proactively communicating with our employees to ensure that they are fully cognisant of the systems and processes that we have implemented to protect our residents and employees. We will ensure that these protocols are shared widely and regularly, including via an increased use of employee-wide ‘essendex’ messages and briefings.

2. Paid Change Time

As COVID-19 is transmitted via droplets and fomites (droplet and contact spread) during close unprotected contact with an infected person or contaminated objects, we have provided staff with specific instructions on how to manage the clothing they wear during their rostered shifts to a community that is under isolation and outbreak management mode. Based upon our discussions with both unions, we are able to confirm that the following protocols are in place from today’s date:

a. Outbreak Homes

In the event of an outbreak, we will direct all staff to change into their designated uniform on site.

From now on, this will be treated as time worked, and impacted employees will be paid *an additional* 15 minutes per shift to account for the donning and doffing of uniforms/scrubs, at an ‘outbreak home’.

b. All Other Homes

Employees are provided the option of changing onsite; however, this is not a direction and will not attract paid time. For those who choose to, lockers and necessary facilities will be made available.

We acknowledge your feedback as to the prior ambiguity of this protocol, and undertake to immediately review and clarify our protocols, and communicate this across our network to ensure that there is a consistent understanding and approach.

With this clarity in the protocol now made, we believe this should resolve the concern as to the adequacy of the laundry allowance.

3. Change Facilities & Lockers.

We note your concerns with respect to the temporary change room facilities. We trust that clarifying our expectations (**above**) with respect to the donning and doffing of uniforms/scrubs on site may alleviate some of the concerns related to capacity.

COVID-19 has presented a number of challenges and an increased use of our locker and change-room facilities at homes. By clarifying our expectations (**above**) with respect to the donning and doffing of uniforms/scrubs we are confident that this may alleviate some of the concerns related to capacity of lockers. We are also committing additional cleaning resources to ensure that staff facilities are regularly assessed and cleaned as part of our ongoing commitment to staff wellbeing and COVID-19 preparedness.

Nonetheless, where these concerns have been raised at a site level, we have immediately addressed these concerns by implementing changes to the facilities offered, including designating

additional change rooms where required. In the event of an outbreak, Bupa have access to approved national contractors who are able to set up temporary change room/tents outside the premises (for example, utilising the carpark space). A similar process has been used with success in some of our Victorian homes.

As part of our ongoing commitment to staff wellbeing and security we are continually assessing and improving our facilities to ensure that the needs of our employees are met. In the event of an outbreak, we anticipate that demand for lockers will increase significantly; as such, we have approved national contractors who are able to set up temporary additional facilities to accommodate this change. A similar process has been used with success in some of our Victorian homes.

The welfare of our employees remains our priority. We are actively reviewing the facilities across our homes to ensure that we are best-placed to meet any future demand as a result of COVID-19.

4. Disposable Meal and Drink Containers

As part of our commitment to limiting the potential spread of COVID-19, we have encouraged our employees to bring their food in disposable packaging. We understand your concerns about the potential financial impost that this may represent. Based upon our discussions with both unions, we are able to confirm that the following protocols are in place from today's date:

a. Outbreak Homes

In the event of an outbreak, we will direct all staff to utilise disposable meal and drink containers. We will provide suitable disposable containers for the use of our employee.

b. All Other Homes

Employees will be *encouraged* to use disposable containers; however, this is not a direction.

We will be taking steps to confirm this approach across the homes to ensure that there is a consistent understanding and approach.

5. Working in isolation

In response to the unprecedent COVID-19 situation, we are continually reviewing and updating our processes in-line with emerging and developing recommendations. All homes are committed to providing optimal privacy and dignity for our staff.

Our homes are clearly zoning green areas for staff break areas / toilets / change facilities when working in isolation. Access to appropriate toilet facilitates and water remains a priority. To this end:

- a. We are currently reviewing our approach to bottled water, consistent with outbreak homes in Victoria. We will notify our employees once this review has been completed.
- b. We are of the view that our staff currently have adequate access to toilet facilities within our homes. In the event you become aware of a specific home or concern, please let us know, and we will address this immediately. If required, additional portable facilities are available to ensure that staff have access to appropriate facilities.

We note your concerns with respect to our employees working in isolation. To date, we are not aware of any homes where the circumstances you have outlined exist – however we take this feedback very seriously and would welcome further information from the either union so that we may immediately investigate further.

6. Additional Duties (Tumut)

As part of our ongoing processes, we constantly review our rosters to ensure that care levels can be maintained, as well as ensuring that our rosters match current occupancy. Within this context, we are of the view that Tumut is staffed appropriately at this time.

We encourage your members to escalate any issues of concern to their General Manager. We continue to actively monitor staffing levels and workload across all our homes.

7. Infection Control Training and PPE

As the residents we care for are often more vulnerable and susceptible to infections, we have existing outbreak prevention measures already in place at our homes, and our teams are experienced in managing infection control. We have further strengthened these existing controls across all of our homes with new sign in processes, proper hygiene reminders and are ensuring all our employees participate in infection control refresher training.

Our current process includes (but is not limited to):

- a. The provision of an infection control module during orientation. This includes a mandatory hand washing module and skills assessment;
- b. A mandatory GROW infection control module;
- c. A face-to-face PPE training and competency assessment for all staff – facilitated by both CQC/CEC and CCMs;
- d. Ongoing face-to-face infection control modules (including PPE training) conducted on site;
- e. A PPE competency assessment for all front-line employees; and,
- f. Continuous review and assessment of the infection control and COVID-19 readiness at our homes, including infection control training and PPE competency.

Given the process set out above, we are surprised that members have reported that they have received insufficient or improper training in infection control and PPE use. We take our occupational health and safety obligations very seriously and are focussed on ensuring appropriate training and adequate access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for those on the frontline of healthcare provision. This includes the provision of face-to-face training and support.

8. Additional Support

We are aware of the significant pressure that an outbreak of COVID-19 will place on our employees. In response to COVID-19, we have remained flexible as to the level and nature of support we have offered to our employees.

For example, in Victoria this has included (but is not limited to):

- a. Extra financial support on-top of hourly rate;
- b. Daily food allowance;
- c. Hotel accommodation;
- d. Provision of flights; and
- e. A discretionary bonus for those who have worked four weeks in an outbreak home.

The above list is not exhaustive. We intend to provide a similar level of flexibility in the event of an outbreak in New South Wales, or other States/Territories. However, we will engage with each employee on a case-by-case basis to ensure that their specific circumstances are catered for as best we can.

9. Escalated Workplace Health and Safety contact

A request was made to have an escalated rapid point-of-contact for Workplace Health and Safety matters. Should the need arise, please contact Mr Tony Tonous, WHS Specialist for Bupa Villages and Aged Care (Tony.Tonous@bupa.com.au) in the first instance.

Brett and Chris, we welcome the feedback from both the NSWNMA and the HSU, and the opportunity to meet with both your organisations last month during this time of great challenge. We will continue to review, assess and where necessary, amend our processes to ensure that we are well-placed to manage the COVID-19 situation as it evolves.

It is worth re-stating the enormous gratitude that our leadership team has for the work, patience, and care our aged care home employees have demonstrated to their residents since the arrival of COVID-19 on Australian shores.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Best

Head of Workplace Relations, People Policy and Conduct Risk A&NZ,
People Team
Bupa

Cc:

Alison Rose
Industrial Officer
Organising Private Hospitals and Aged Care
NSWNMA

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