

April 9, 2020

Re: COVID-19 Pandemic Update

To All Staff,



Recently Mike Keenan, our President and CEO, sent each of you a letter thanking you and describing two new initiatives we have implemented during the current pandemic: free employee daily meals and the “We Care \$2.00 Differential.” We will be following up with weekly letters updating you on what we are doing, why we are taking certain steps, and highlighting resources available to you. We feel this communication is much needed in a time of uncertainty. We are a team, and we are facing the COVID-19 situation together. You will be seeing changes that might make you nervous or apprehensive. The changes we are making are so we can protect you and our residents in the event anyone comes down with the virus. We truly appreciate your continued dedication to our residents and to each other. We are continuing to do everything possible to support your health and well-being.

Essential Business/Essential Employees

Good Shepherd is an essential business as defined by the *New York State on Pause Executive Order* as we provide elder care and operate nursing homes and residential health care facilities. We rely on our employees to continue to report to work as scheduled. Each of you provide a vital service to allow us to continue to care for our residents. You should have received a letter that should be kept with you when commuting to and from work. This letter explains to anyone who may question your need to travel that you are deemed essential and exempt from the Executive Order. If you haven’t received this letter, please contact Human Resources.

We may need all hands on deck, regardless of job title, especially if we need to redeploy resources. For example, we will be training non-clinical staff to provide assistance with feeding in accordance with DOH directives to be ready if our clinical staff needs assistance. We have already cross-trained some of our support staff to work as Unit Assistants in Health Care, providing non-clinical support to our nursing staff. Though we don’t know what will happen in the next few months, we appreciate everyone’s willingness to help out where necessary.

We are screening all employees and vendors as they arrive. This is in accordance with NYS Department of Health directives. DOH has also detailed the appropriate responses if the screening raises any concerns, and protocols for employees returning to work afterwards.

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act

The CARES Act was enacted to address the difficulties that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Included in this law was a provision that provides for Tax-Favored Withdrawals (Special Distribution) from 403(b) Retirement Plans for impacted plan participants. We have changed our plan to incorporate the provisions of this law into our retirement plan. This means eligible participants may request penalty-free distributions from their own 403(b) account of up to \$100,000, for qualifying coronavirus-related reasons. An example of a qualifying reason would be being laid off or having work hours reduced.

Normally, non-hardship withdrawals are subject to a 10% penalty which will be waived. This distribution will be subject to ordinary income tax, but that ordinary income tax can be paid over a three-year period.

However, it is important to emphasize that the Special Distribution only applies to individual plan participants that meet certain requirements. If you think you may qualify and are interested in a learning more about a distribution due to COVID-19 related financial hardship, please contact the participant service center at 1-800-716-3742.

New York State COVID-19 Emotional Support Helpline

New York State has set-up an Emotional Support Helpline for healthcare workers and first responders on the front lines of the COVID-19 emergency. You can call the Emotional Support Hotline for help with anxiety, stress, depression, trauma, and grief. The number to call is 1-844-863-9314, 8am – 10pm, seven days a week.

In addition to the NYS Hot-line, employees and their family members can also access up to eight free sessions from our EAP provider, ENI. The number to call is 1-800-327-2255, we encourage you to take advantage of this benefit.

United Healthcare

United Healthcare is waiving member cost-sharing for the treatment of COVID-19 until May 31, 2020, for Medicare Advantage, Medicaid, Individual and Group Market fully insured health plans. This builds on the company's previously announced efforts to waive cost-sharing for COVID-19 testing and the testing-related visit. Only a health care provider can order testing for COVID-19. If you think you need a test, talk to your provider right away.

Also, starting March 31, 2020, until June 18, 2020, United Healthcare will also waive cost-sharing for in-network, **non-COVID-19 telehealth visits**.

Negative Pressure Areas

At each of our campuses, we are working proactively to create an area to treat COVID-19 positive residents should one of our residents contract the virus. While we do not have any active cases at any of our facilities currently, it is important to be prepared in advance. These areas are being designed to create negative pressure which is an [isolation](#) technique used to prevent cross-contamination from room to room. Each area will include a separate exit area where staff can remove possibly contaminated PPEs upon exiting. We sincerely hope we never have to put these areas to use, but the truth is if you wait for your first resident to test positive to start the process, you are already too late. This area will provide enhanced safety not just for our residents, but to our staff as they provide care as well if we are faced with an active COVID-19 case.

We appreciate your on-going commitment in following all practices and protocols put in place to help maintain a healthy working environment for all of us. We realize this can be challenging at times, but we ask for your patience and cooperation as we implement and refine actions that are in all of our best interests. Senior Management across all our facilities meets daily by phone to discuss where we are and what we need to do to protect our residents and you. We are constantly refining our planning process as new information becomes available. In addition, there are short daily meetings with all managers at each campus to be sure they are also aware of any new information, and so they can share any issues or concerns they hear from their staff. Please, if you have questions or concerns, contact your HR department or your manager so we can address them.

Sincerely,

Linda Parke
Director of Human Resources