

Special COVID-19 Resource Section

Senior Living After COVID-19

Managing through the pandemic for long-term success.

The challenges faced by the long-term care industry during the COVID-19 pandemic are both internal and external, from navigating ever-changing regulatory guidelines and administrative decision-making, to caring for residents with a lack of staffing and resources—and doing all this while tactfully overcoming negative press and public perception.

In June 2019, Constellation led a panel discussion on these topics, inviting industry experts including Scott Riddle, CEO and President, Walker Methodist, and Constellation Board Member; Jonathan Lips, VP of Legal and Regulatory Affairs, LeadingAge Minnesota; Bob McNaney, Senior VP of Crisis + Critical Issues, Padilla; and moderated by Laurie Drill-Mellum, MD, Chief Medical Officer of Constellation.

The group offered potential solutions to help minimize the long-term impact on residents, families and employees, while protecting the business of operating senior and long-term care facilities.



Scott Riddle
CEO and President,
Walker Methodist



Jonathan Lips
VP of Legal and Regulatory Affairs,
LeadingAge Minnesota



Bob McNaney
Senior VP of Crisis +
Critical Issues, Padilla



Laurie Drill-Mellum, MD
Chief Medical Officer
of Constellation

Six key strategies to help you better manage through COVID-19

One

Stay abreast of rapidly changing guidelines and document your decision-making

Lips notes there are several categories of challenges as we move through this public health emergency. The volume and frequency of federal regulatory and public health updates can be overwhelming, as well as how state departments of health are applying the federal updates and supplementing guidance. Verbal direction may vary from written direction that follows later in the same day. And to top it all off, tracking differences in guidance for different types of senior care can present additional challenge. "Finding the guidance within the gray has been very challenging," says Lips.

Riddle notes it's important to "be cautious and save your sanity by waiting until you get (the guidance) in writing" before you share new updates with your teams. Also important is setting expectations with your teams, making clear that things are going to be constantly evolving and changing.

It's also critical to document the decisions you make, both for future scrutiny and also to help you plan as you move forward.

What you can do:

- Identify a limited list of core "sources of truth" (CDC, CMS, state health officials)
- Attend state or local health department briefings, calls and webinars, and identify inconsistencies needing resolution
- Lean on your provider associations and tell them what you need
- Monitor guidance regularly and subscribe to receive "push" notifications
- Assign an accountable person/team to monitor regulations and guidance, and determine the best way to distribute this information to your teams and staff
- Document administrative decisions and rationale
 - ✓ Note the date any policy or protocol goes into service
 - ✓ Cite the regulations and/or guidance decisions were based on
 - ✓ Include rationale regarding ability to comply (e.g., resource availability, staffing and availability)

Two

Protect your residents and your teams

Safety for our seniors has become our primary job, according to Riddle. Infection control is key—e.g., getting the right PPE, conducting proper testing, limiting visitors and following the CDC guidelines. Protecting team members is critical, too. "The idea is to enhance lives of the people we care for, and the lives of the people who are doing the caring, as much as possible by protecting them ... on a daily basis," says Riddle.

In addition, Lips recommends that you reach out to your peers—learn what is working elsewhere for residents, families and their communities.

What you can do:

- Update your Infection Prevention and Control Program (IPC)
 - ✓ Accountable individual with IPC training
 - ✓ Infection surveillance
 - ✓ COVID-19 testing
 - ✓ Competency-based training of team members
 - ✓ Updated sick leave policy
- Seek guidance regularly
 - ✓ FDA
 - ✓ CDC Infection Control
 - ✓ CMS
 - ✓ State Departments of Health
 - ✓ Provider associations

Three

Manage wisely under decreased revenue and increased costs

Decreases in occupancy, restricted visits and other conditions are not ideal, but something most senior living communities are facing due to COVID-19. In this scenario, with costs increasing and revenue down, it's imperative to find ways to offset these changes. Seeking grants or other monies, delaying hiring and cutting expenses may be necessary. Riddle has looked at cutting things that don't negatively impact the quality of care, such as travel expenses and seminars, and has devoted resources to researching state grants and foundations available to help with funds during the pandemic.

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What you can do:

- Determine potential losses of revenue—which sources and when
- Determine extra expenses—PPE, chemicals, staffing, hero pay
- Reduce expenses where possible
 - ✓ Delay hiring open positions, misc. expenses
- Research grant and government funding opportunities
 - ✓ PPP, CARES Act, foundation grants
- Plan for “better normal” as quickly as safe

Four

Support your team members emotionally

Pressure to work, fear of sickness or making others sick, fear for their seniors, working without PPE or proper training—these are just the beginning of the moral injury that has been afflicted on care team members. Family needs can arise as well—things like access to child care, issues around school closures, or finding accommodations to protect families from risk of the virus.

Dr. Drill-Mellum emphasized the importance of taking care of those on the front lines of care, and she shared information from a recent Stanford study of 69 individuals that identified 8 sources of anxiety health care professionals are facing during the pandemic, including access to PPEs, getting exposed to the virus at work and bringing the infection home to their families, and concern over access to testing if they develop symptoms. They also worry about providing competent care if they are stretched or deployed to a different area.¹

As leaders, says Riddle, it’s important to let people know we’re all in this together. McNaney adds that listening is critical, understanding that people need space to voice displeasures—and recognize “it’s coming from a place of frustration and fatigue and fear, and not a place of ill-will.”

What you can do:

- Provide encouragement
 - ✓ Daily
 - ✓ Specific
 - ✓ Words and actions
- Support leadership so they can support their teams
- Offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

1. Shanafelt T, Ripp J, Trockel M. Understanding and Addressing Sources of Anxiety Among Health Care Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *JAMA*. 2020;323(21):2133–2134. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.5893

Five

Communicate effectively to build trust and overcome negative publicity

Media has painted a picture of significant infection in senior living communities, creating a hurdle that can be hard to climb. Says McNaney, “Keep talking to (your residents, family and staff). The lack of communication creates distance, and

distance creates distrust. If you’re not talking to them, they’re going to make up their own story.” Focusing on the “why” is key to continuing to protect everyone in your facility and to provide outstanding safety and care.

What you can do:

- Provide open and timely information to families
- Build trust: The lack of communication creates distance and distrust
- Support your staff and mention their efforts to keep morale up
- Pay attention to safety and wellbeing as the foundation for every decision
- Listen to your families and residents and use what you learn to better the situation
- Accept failures, fix them and communicate the fix—realize that no one is perfect

Six

Identify operational considerations going forward

As the pandemic appeared, it was important to identify the scale and pace of what needed to be done, and find the resolve to do it. As the situation continues, it’s necessary to push through the ongoing stress of a situation that has no clear end-point. Now is the time to look for weak links in your operations, and begin to reimagine a new normal.

The re-opening should be planful, so start now and determine a phased approach because, as Lips points out, things are not going to automatically go back to normal. Lips recommends the McKinsey article, [“Beyond coronavirus: The path to the next normal,”](#) which provides a good framework for leaders as they navigate the next 18 months.

What you can do:

- Follow CMS/State “blueprint” and guidance for safe reopening
- Begin planning now and expect to move incrementally, in phases
- Maintain focus on Infection Prevention and Control (“new normal”)
- Implement COVID-19 testing as a key ingredient to re-opening
- Make sure team members (employees) are safe at work
 - ✓ PPE
 - ✓ Environmental changes/Working from home
- Understand shifts in demand for service lines in the future
 - ✓ Independent Living
 - ✓ Assisted Living/Memory Care
 - ✓ Skilled Nursing /TCU
 - ✓ Home Care/Hospice
 - ✓ Other

WATCH THE COMPLETE WEBINAR, [“MANAGING THE CHALLENGES IN LONG TERM CARE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC”](#)

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic Resources for Senior Living

AMDA

- ✓ [Update on COVID-19](#)

CDC

- ✓ [COVID-19: Long-term Care Facilities, Nursing Homes](#)
- ✓ [Infection Prevention and Control Assessment Tool for Nursing Homes Preparing for COVID-19](#)
- ✓ [Considerations for Preventing Spread of COVID-19 in Assisted Living Facilities](#)

CMS

- ✓ [COVID-19 Long-Term Care Facility Guidance](#)
- ✓ [Long-Term Care Nursing Homes Telehealth and Telemedicine Tool Kit](#)

FDA

- ✓ [COVID-19](#)
- ✓ [Enforcement Policy for Face Masks and Respirators During the Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) Public Health Emergency Guidance for Industry and Food and Drug Administration Staff](#)

NIH

- ✓ [COVID-19 Essential Worker Training](#)

NIOSH

- ✓ [Coronavirus Disease – 2019 guidance for personal protective equipment and resources](#)

OSHA

- ✓ [Guidance for Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)
- ✓ [COVID-19 Guidance for Nursing Home and Long-Term Care Facility Workers PDF](#)

ECRI Institute

- ✓ [COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) Outbreak Preparedness Center: guidance, checklists and resources for health care organizations](#)
- ✓ [COVID-19 Resources for Aging Care](#)
- ✓ [Role of Transparency and Notifications in Aging Services during COVID-19](#)
- ✓ [Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) Supply Equivalents](#)

Caring through COVID-19:

Bethesda of Beresford finds creative ways to connect

Ribbons around trees, visits through windows and iPad chats with families—Bethesda of Beresford has found creative ways to connect residents and families, despite the isolation required by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Donations of iPads from Dakota Valley Schools and more use of technology have been key ways residents have been able to stay in touch, says Cheryl Hallaway, administrator of Bethesda of Beresford, a senior living community with more than 60 residents in Beresford, SD.

And while large group activities have been canceled temporarily, Elizabeth McManus, activities director, says they've found ways to bring smaller, socially-distanced groups together and made sure to make time for things like "Go Fish" card games out on the patio—of course wearing masks and keeping a safe distance.

Physical touch is important for residents, so not having families visit has been especially hard. But the increase in video visits has made a difference. One resident was able to

re-connect with a daughter who had been out of touch for years, resulting in a long, heartfelt conversation that staff was able to facilitate.

Staff has also helped residents pre-record video messages for families, and they've encouraged families to wave through windows, plant trees outside, send care packages, or share special messages that can be announced over the in-house cable channel or intercom system.

McManus sees video chats playing a larger role going forward. Residents have responded enthusiastically to learning how to use the technology, and enjoyed the extra connections possible with their families and friends. It's been "life-changing," says McManus. "Our time with others right now is precious."

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