

Long Island Business News article

For the elderly, letting life go on

By: [Julianne Mosher](#) July 6, 2020

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the elderly were among the hardest-hit people to contract and die from the virus. Nursing homes, visiting homecare and assisted living centers had to suspend programs and shut their doors to visitors as they set up new regulations to keep their patrons safe.

But as New York comes out of those dark days, these institutions are figuring out how to maintain the health and safety of their clients while still letting them live their lives.

Lisa Newcomb, executive director of the Empire State Association of Assisted Living (ESAAL) said that her organization has been advocating for adult care facilities and assisted living residences to begin opening up, but with serious safety precautions.

“We want to balance the health and safety of our guests, but their emotional well-being is just as important,” she said. “We want to slowly bring them back to doing what they love.”

She said that during the stay-at-home orders, guests were unable to visit with family or friends. Right now, visitations are not allowed inside these facilities or outside in close distances, but some places are getting creative.

Parker Jewish Institute for Healthcare and Rehabilitation in New Hyde Park recently decided to host drive-by and socially distant family visits. At a scheduled time, family members were required to wear masks and sit outside the center while their loved ones waved from a distance. Each visit was scheduled for 15-minutes, with a five-minute break in-between.

“We are thrilled to offer this opportunity for families so that they may reconnect in person, all the while maintaining a safe distance,” Michael Rosenblut, Parker’s president and CEO, said in a statement. “Our mission goes beyond caring for residents, but doing whatever we can to meet the needs of Parker’s extended family, and we just can’t wait to welcome them back.”

The facilities are also changing their protocols inside for employees.

Parker Jewish Institute’s Infection Control Patrol is ensuring that staff throughout the facility maintains the “highest standards” in fighting the spread of disease and viruses.

The Infection Control Patrol is made up of interdisciplinary volunteers from Parker’s Infection Prevention Committee. The unit adheres to the strictest infection-prevention standards set forth by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the New York State Department of Health, officials said.

Patrol members make their rounds throughout Parker care areas, ensuring that staff is complying with the institute’s rigorous standards. This includes ensuring that all housekeeping, hygiene and infection control measures are properly carried out and by responding to questions from residents and staff.

“Parker Jewish Institute takes infection control very seriously, and provides training to all employees,” Rosenblut said. “Our Infection Control Patrol accelerates our strident measures to the next level. And we welcome innovative ideas from our entire staff to ensure that we deliver the very best in health care to our patients and residents.”

Newcomb said that employees and visitors in many other facilities will continue to screen and monitor temperatures as well as use a symptoms checklist upon sign-in. Face masks must be worn at all times, training on infection control related issues and awareness has been enhanced, and in larger communities, some members may request approval from the New York Department of Health to have more than one seating for meals.



This “Parker at Your Door” vehicle that brings caregivers to clients who want to stay home.

Assisted living providers are also continuing to prioritize communication to keep family members informed on how their loved ones are doing. Prior to the coronavirus, communications were typically restricted to resident-family. That will continue so that providers can keep each family updated on the details of their own loved ones’ well-being.

But the COVID crisis has necessitated more general communications to all families. Providers have become comfortable using technologies like FaceTime, Zoom and Skype to communicate with each other. Telemedicine has also been introduced more to reduce doctor visits out.

“While the past four months have been challenging for ESAAL and its 300 assisted living facility members and their residents across New York State, we are proud of the way they have stepped up to the challenge,” Newcomb said.

While changes are still evolving, the new guidelines are also being brought to visiting homecare.

Parker Jewish Institute resumed its “Parker at Your Door,” a medical house-call program. The protocol includes asking questions regarding health and the family who lives with the client before entrance. The nurse practitioner dresses in head-to-toe personal protective equipment gear, including masks, gowns and shoe coverings, to keep families and employees safe.

Each nurse practitioner is tested for COVID-19 to meet federal and state guidelines.

For families, homecare reduces the burden of caring for their loved ones. These programs enable older adults to maintain their health so that they can continue to live in their homes, where they are most comfortable.

That is a priority for the team at Friends for Life Homecare. Just before the pandemic hit, they opened their third location in Babylon. The family-owned and operated business' goal is for seniors to remain independent and live in the comforts of their home.



Two volunteers with Parker Jewish Institutes Infection Control Patrol who ensure everyone is staying safe and abiding by the rules.

“Our mission in life is helping seniors,” Amy Recco, co-founder of the homecare service and outreach program, said. “We hold everybody’s hand throughout their journey.” In addition to the homecare services for the elderly disabled, their specialists offer Medicaid and senior planning to guide seniors and their families.

When they opened their doors in March, they were concerned that the pandemic would affect them negatively, as it has for so many small businesses. However, when some nursing homes started to become understaffed, business for them picked up.

“People were taking their loved ones home from assisted living,” Recco said. “Our caregivers were working overtime, around the clock and following protocols.”

Recco insisted on a rule that her caregivers must not take public transportation to their clients. Instead, Friends For Life hired drivers to bring them to the homes safely.

“We’ve been able to help so many people,” Recco said. “It’s been a sad time, but we have helped so many families... they survived because they were safe at home.”