

Caledon nursing home 'in good shape' as military issues damning report on industry

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

Five senior care homes have been condemned by a Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) report showing negligence, abuse and unhygienic conditions during the COVID-19 crisis.

Roughly 1,700 military members were deployed to senior care homes on April 18 to assist in caring for those most vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. Military members stepped up to provide cleaning services, serve food and help with other basic needs. Following several weeks of assistance, CAF members were appalled to witness the conditions of the care centres.

The Ministry of Long-Term Care has ordered an inspection team to conduct thorough investigations on several 'high-risk long-term care homes', while Eatonville Care Centre, Hawthorne Place Care Centre, Altamont Care Community, Orchard Villa and Camilla Care Community are all under new temporary management.

The CAF report, which was released last Tuesday (May 23) highlighted abuse, bug infestations, and staff wearing the same personal protective equipment throughout different units of the care homes, as being significant problems.

Premier Doug Ford shared his feelings at a news conference a few days later, calling these conditions 'gut wrenching'.

'Today, we are taking further steps to protect our most vulnerable seniors across the province to fix the broken system we inherited. We will do whatever it takes to get the job done because as Premier, the buck stops with me,' said Mr. Ford in a press release on May 26. 'I made a commitment to our long-term care residents and their families that there would be accountability and justice after receiving the military's heart-breaking report on the state of five of our homes.'

As a result of the deployment, known as Operation LASER, 15 CAF members have tested positive for the virus in Ontario, and 25 in Quebec.

Executive Director of King Nursing Home in Bolton, Janice King shared how they are taking care of their residents and what changes have been made in these difficult times.

'Like all long-term care, we have restricted entrance to the home for staff and essential services only. Our staff are universally masked,' she explained. 'We have a screen in full PPE at the front entrance to interview and record individuals' responses to the screening questionnaire. Those who may not pass screening are instructed to use the ABHR, leave and instructed to seek COVID-19 testing.'

Both indoor and outdoor areas that see any human contact are sanitized between each person, as well as a secondary sanitizer that has been recently introduced for added hand hygiene for staff. Each staff member is screened before their shift, as well as after, with temperatures taken daily and recorded. Those who feel unwell as required to stay home to self-isolate. Staff members are swabbed and isolated from residents if they show even one symptom of the COVID-19 virus.

'Staff wear full PPE, including gloves, gowns, face shields and masks when providing care or interacting with these residents. To accommodate the isolation, we have operated below our licensed occupancy capacity in order to have appropriate spaces or rooms available for these precautions,' said King. 'Prior to admission or readmission from a hospital, all residents are tested and must have a negative COVID-19 result and then isolated for 14 days. This probably has been one of our greatest challenges as we do not have a supply of empty private rooms to do this, and we have had to mitigate this by not having full occupancy and leaving some of our beds empty so that we can move residents about to accommodate the need to isolate and keep the residents and staff safe.'

Each nursing and housekeeping staff member are designated to specific units to prevent spread of germs to other areas of the home. King Nursing Home has increased their housekeeping staff hours to keep the care centre clean at all times. Staff breaks are staggered to keep physical distancing in place, as well as only one staff member being allowed in and out at a time to prevent any human contact with one another.

“We implemented an evening shift to concentrate on high contact touch points and surfaces. With these measures we are able to sanitize and disinfect these surfaces a minimum of four times daily. During their rounds, the housekeeper also has alcohol-based hand sanitizing of residents after meals. Nursing staff sanitize their hands prior to meals,” explained King.

Physical distancing is being practiced for not only staff and residents, but with families and visitors. Families of residents are able to have virtual calls through technology to keep communication and contact as well as physical distancing patio visits as the warm weather approaches.

The need for additional assistance and resources has been an ongoing issue for long term care homes, both pre-pandemic and now. Especially during these difficult times, King explains how care centres are in need more than ever.

“Adequate resources such as the need to increase staffing levels, staffing education challenges, and the need to rebuild the older homes were a challenge well prior to COVID-19. The latest public inquiry into the safety and security of Residents in the Long-Term Care Homes System by Eileen Gillese (Wettlaufer Inquiry) spoke to the underfunding of long-term care as well,” said King. “Long-term care has been advocating for years for increased funding to support the rising acuity needs of the residents and largely have been ignored for years.”

She added, “Long-term care urgently needs the Ontario government to ensure the supply of PPE, rapid testing, increased frequency of staff testing and investments to enable more effective infection control, continuing human resources flexibility and increased staffing and support from our Medical Directors, hospitals and a true partnership between long-term care and the rest of the health system.”

In light of the difficult times, families have been showing their support by donating meals and making monetary donations to the facility. King says she's thankful for her staff stepping up to provide the best service possible during these testing times.

“Our staff have been great throughout these trying times and are always looking for ways to provide feedback and continuously improve in what we do. They truly are health care heroes,” she said.