



April 16, 2020

To Members of our Laurel Family:

As you are likely aware, the Chatham County Health Department chose to conduct universal testing at our facility on April 10, following an initial positive diagnosis. Through this universal testing of all residents and all staff, the final results from the April 10 testing confirmed a total of 57 positive diagnoses of COVID-19 and 178 negative results. Since that time, we have been in contact with many of you, with our initial focus on connecting with those of you with loved ones who have tested positive. We hope to address some of the questions you may have in this letter.

UNIVERSAL TESTING

Chatham County Public Health and UNC Health, in collaboration with The Laurels, were able to provide universal testing to all guests and associates at the facility after initially reporting six positive tests. Unfortunately, limited testing is available for COVID-19 nationwide, so prior to being afforded universal testing, we had previously only been able to prioritize testing for individuals who were symptomatic. As this universal testing included testing of asymptomatic (meaning there are no symptoms) individuals, the number of cases, not surprisingly, increased. The Laurels is one of a select few skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) in North Carolina to have been able to provide guests and employees with universal testing. If this kind of testing was available for all SNFs, you would unquestionably see increased cases at all facilities, as some asymptomatic individuals would inevitably test positive. Without testing, asymptomatic individuals cannot possibly know they have (or have had) COVID-19. We appreciate the approach of Chatham County Public Health Department and UNC Health in this effort as obviously, it is helpful for everyone involved to know these results.

TREATMENT

Guests who have tested positive are receiving supportive care in an isolated area of the building. Because of the unpredictability of the virus and the possibility of sudden changes in health, we are continually monitoring **ALL** guests – especially those who have tested positive – for symptoms (cough, fever, respiratory difficulties) and are regularly screening for temperature or any other signs. Currently there is no known cure for COVID-19 and no perfect treatment plan as so little remains known about the virus. Local hospitals have encouraged SNFs like ours to attempt to provide care in place whenever possible. Our Medical Director and physicians remain in close contact with our staff in their efforts to address our guests' needs.

PPE (PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT)

At this time, we do have an adequate supply of PPE for residents and employees. Chatham County's emergency management department delivered a shipment of PPE on April 13 and additional PPE was supplied by sister facilities and the corporate office. **PPE is unfortunately a problem for almost all long-term care facilities, and is not unique to The Laurels** – hospitals continue to receive priority for these items. Due to global supply chain shortages for high-demand PPE like gowns and masks, organizations may have to resort to using non-traditional methods and supplies as needed to achieve the same goals of protecting employees, protecting patients, and preventing disease spread. In lieu of PPE, items like homemade masks, aprons, lab coats, open-back gowns, coveralls, and ponchos – to name a few – can be used as alternatives to provide some level of protection, with CDC guidance and recommendations. We continue to accept donations of these items in the event future PPE shortages arise. Our associates are trained and educated routinely on the changing guidelines regarding the proper use of PPE and encouraged to seek assistance from their supervisor, department manager, director of nursing, administrator and even our Corporate Help Line available to all associates.

STAFFING

As with PPE, staffing is unfortunately an industry-wide issue *pre-Covid*, and has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. At The Laurels of Chatham, some associates who have tested positive but are asymptomatic have been asked to continue to work. This is consistent with CDC guidance, which allows senior care facility workers who test positive but are asymptomatic the option to work with residents who also tested positive. While we have requested this of some associates, **we would never force an associate who has tested positive to work against his or her will.** Unfortunately, we have also lost some staff members out of concerns they have heard from the media, which certainly doesn't help the situation. We continue to actively investigate alternate staffing solutions, including the hiring of temporary universal workers to assist the building with tasks unrelated to direct resident care to ease the burdens on our associates, as well as assistance from other Laurel facilities. Chatham County emergency management recently submitted a request to the state and through this means, we have received additional assistance to help with the staffing shortages. Please think of ways you may be able to encourage our staff members you come in contact with.

GUIDELINES/DIRECTIVES

The Laurels has been implementing and acting on guidance from external agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the Department of Health and Human Services since February 28. We have restricted visitors from entering our facility since the national advisement on March 11, ceased group activities within the building, and have continually monitored residents and screened staff members and essential external personnel for symptoms daily. Our leadership team has maintained close communication with Chatham County Public Health Department to ensure we are following recommended preventative steps, and we modify our actions based on the guidance we are given. An environmental health inspector with Chatham County visited the facility on March 4 — five days after the facility put procedures in place to help curb COVID-19 — and gave it a score of 99.5. We recognize that with new information being shared daily about the virus, this will be an ongoing challenge requiring ongoing modifications to our practices. We are committed to doing whatever it takes to stay abreast of the new guidance and directives.

ZOOM FAMILY COUNCIL

We are working on setting up a Zoom family council to provide updates and to help address general questions you may have. **We will be in contact to deliver specifics to you: date, time and log-in information.** In the meantime, we encourage you to contact our facility with any questions you may have. If you have a **NON-URGENT** message for a loved one, you can send to ConnectToChatham@laurelhealth.com and we will be sure to pass it along.

If you have a loved one **who has tested positive**, we will communicate with you regularly and keep you apprised of any changes to his or her health. If you have a loved one **who has NOT tested positive**, we will contact you if he or she is suspected or diagnosed with COVID-19.

We need your help in battling COVID-19. Please visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](#) to learn how you can help prevent the spread in our community.

We know this is a difficult time for everyone. We truly empathize with everyone who has been adversely affected by COVID-19 and we are doing everything we can to keep your loved ones safe. The support we have received from our community has been humbling, and we truly appreciate your continued support, patience and understanding. We will get through this together.

Sincerely,

John Jarrell, LNHA
Administrator

John Corey, MD
Medical Director

Anita Spake, RN
Director of Nursing