Allowing visitors back in nursing homes
A Dutch national study

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February 1st 2021
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COVID-19 in the Netherlands

Total Covid-19 cases: 992,075
Deaths: 14,108
(date Feb 1st 2021, source: John Hopkins)

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living lab in ageing and south long-term care limburg
COVID-19 in nursing homes

- # Nursing homes with COVID-19

- Most recent estimation: 29,805 COVID-19 cases in NHs
  - 3,600 have died
  - 6,566 recovered

Source: Verenso, January 26th 2021
Nursing homes closed nationally on March 20\textsuperscript{th} 2020

In the southern part of the Netherlands, organizations closed from March 10\textsuperscript{th}

Alle verpleeghuizen waren bezoekers in strijd tegen coronavirus
Ban for visitors

• Highly restrictive measure
  - No family/friends/volunteers allowed
  - Only health services if highly necessary

• Creative alternatives
  - E.g. window visiting, separate container

• BUT serious challenge to residents’ autonomy

• Primary data lacking
Cautiously opening doors

• Two months after ban, measures to cautiously allowing visitors

• National pilot project in 26 nursing homes
  - Start date: May 11th 2020

• Specific guideline for allowing visitors back in nursing
  - Developed by stakeholders in the field
    - Professional organizations for old age medicine, psychologists, nurses
    - Client representative organization, Alzheimer’s Society
    - Sector organization for nursing homes
  - Guideline is directive, not mandatory
    - Depending on the local context
Key points Guideline - Visitors

• 1 designated visitor allowed per residents

• Make agreements with nursing home on frequency and duration of visits. Visitors are spread throughout the day and week

• Visits take place at 1.5m (i.e. 5 feet) distance
  - including from staff and other residents
  - hygiene measures at entrance

• Visitors should be free from COVID-19 symptoms

• Visitors are obliged to wear a protective mouth mask for visiting residents who are difficult to instruct (e.g. with dementia)
Key points - Organization

• Should observe regulations and keep perspective on well-being

• Sufficient protective equipment, thermometer assessment and sufficient applications

• Strict hygiene protocol

• Sufficient staffing

• Sufficient test capacity by Local Health Authority
Results after first week

- Staff: Fear of infections
- Some incidents with family
- Shortage in PPE

- Staff, family and residents very happy with personal contact in real life
Results after 4 weeks

• Concerns of staff for long-term implementation of guidelines
  - High workload with organizing, planning and regulating visits

• Different regulations among nursing homes in a similar region
  - Difficult for family caregivers

• No new infections in the 76 participating nursing homes
  - In comparison: 732 new cases reported in nursing homes during the same period in the Netherlands

Source: Verenso
Impact on well-being

• All nursing homes were unanimously positive about visits

“The visits have a positive influence. Drinking a cup of coffee together, being together in the same space without a screen in between. It seems a small step, but it feels as a giant emotional step.” Manager, Nursing Home 17

“A staff member cannot replace a family member...Since our residents know that they are allowed to receive a visitor again, they are in a different mood and have something to look forward to again.” Manager, Nursing Home 6”
Safe visiting in nursing homes

• June 15th: National guidelines were less restrictive, e.g. more than 1 designated visitor for all residents

• July 1st: Nursing homes open as usual

• Lessons learned:
  - The measures were too restrictive for a too long period
  - Directly positive impact on residents by allowing visitors
  - Reported cases from practice of death by loneliness, deterioration of residents during lockdown
  - Why were nursing homes lagging behind on hospitals regarding PPE supply?

• Debate of infection prevention vs. quality of life
Original Study

Allowing Visitors Back in the Nursing Home During the COVID-19 Crisis: A Dutch National Study Into First Experiences and Impact on Well-Being

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New survey
End September / Early October 2020

Was daily life back to normal and did organizations felt prepared for a 2nd wave of COVID-19?
Results (1)

• 63 / 76 nursing homes responded (83%)
  - Approximately 25% (n=16) locations had COVID-19 infections

• >90% has continued normal activities related to:
  - Residents participate in activities, going outside, leave the unit with family, receiving care from physicians and other health services
  - Regular safety regulations in place (e.g. no group activities)

• 75% receives regular participation of volunteers

• 65% visitation as before COVID-19
  - 35% have some guidelines ranging from registration, only 1 visitor a day
Stepped approach allowing visits

• Example location 2:
  - In 7 steps back to “normal”

  May 27th: walking outside was allowed (alone or with 1 designated visitor), mout care

  June 15th: 2 designated visitors allowed in the afternoon

  June 18th: residents allowed visiting with family at home / outside NH, restaurant open for residents only

  June 29th: 4 designated visitors, only 2 at a time

  July 4th: all visitors were welcome again, without appointment

  July 15th: restaurant was open for the community

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Results (2)

- Majority felt prepared for 2nd wave COVID-19
  - Sufficient PPE, availability local protocols and test capacity

- Perceived stress by staff was / is high
  - High absence rates (e.g. quarantine, “long” COVID)
  - Tiredness staff (e.g. constantly changing rules / regulations)

- Fragile balance between fear of infection and impact of restrictions on well-being residents
Conclusion

• A general ban for visitors is not necessary and may do more harm than good for older people living in nursing homes
  - In the Dutch law: no more general ban for visitors; local bans may be applied in “outbreak” situation

• Residents should have a voice and be heard

• Risk management plan of both acute and chronic threats for quality of life of residents in nursing homes

• Dignity at the end-of life

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COVID-19 in the NL

Officially COVID-19 cases reported by local health authority

Face mask obligatory in public spaces
Source: RIVM

- Restaurants and bars closed
- Full lockdown: stores, schools, day care, gym, "transfer" locations such as theatre etc. are closed
- Max 2 visitors a day for general population
- Max 1 visitor a day
- Curfew: 9pm-4.30AM

Visitng / crowd restrictions general population

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