



To: Arbor Acres Residents, Families, Staff and Board Members
From: Andrew Applegate, President and CEO
RE: Testing Results
Date: March 8, 2021

Last week I had an email exchange with a few residents regarding the memos I have sent alerting the community to COVID-19 testing results. Specifically, the question was how is it that we are getting positive test results on residents in our licensed areas when our staff tests are coming back negative? My response to the question seemed helpful, so we thought it would be beneficial to share it more broadly in the hopes to not only answering the question, but to also set expectations regarding this next phase of the pandemic.

So, what might be the cause of these positive test results?

1. There is the possibility we are getting false positives. False positives are when a COVID-19 test is run and appears that a person has COVID-19, but in actuality, does not. Is that a possibility? In a word, yes. However, our laboratory has made it a practice of re-running positive tests before alerting Arbor Acres. As a result, we have a high degree of confidence in positive test results.
2. There is the possibility we are getting false negatives. A false negative is when the COVID-19 test comes back negative, but in actuality is positive. We have had cases of staff who never tested positive, but then found out that a family member in their household tested positive. As a result, they refrained from coming to work and were out for the prescribed quarantine period. During that time, they came down with all the same signs and symptoms of their positive family member but never tested positive when they took a follow up test in the community.
3. There is the possibility that it is being spread during family or compassionate care visits. While a possibility, with all the quarantining and the need to keep personal protective equipment on at all times, this scenario is unlikely.
4. There is the possibility that residents might be spreading it amongst themselves. With that said, it does not explain the residents who are isolated or bedfast.
5. There is a possibility that the residents who are testing positive fall in the 5% for whom the vaccine is not effective. The Moderna vaccine is 95% effective; however, there is that 5% possibility. Additionally, there is the fact that older adults may not respond as robustly to the vaccine as a younger adult.

Any or all of these scenarios are possibilities. As you know, medicine is categorized as an art vs. a science for a reason. We are humans working with humans and individuals' responses to vaccines and treatments varies widely. We can be grateful that the vast majority of those who are testing positive are asymptomatic with only a few having mild symptoms. What we have in our arsenal is a proven vaccine, personal protective equipment, and the protocols we have had in place since this pandemic started a year ago.

I hope you will take comfort in knowing that the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) follows all positive resident cases in our skilled nursing area. Also, state inspectors perform on-site infection control surveys when we have any new outbreaks. Each time they are on site they scrutinize our infection control policies and procedures. In each case, we have either been found to be in compliance and even commended for our work. A few weeks ago, Strickland Place received its annual licensure and certification survey and earned a report free of deficiencies, something nearly unheard of in this profession.

The reality for the coming months is to expect erratic test results like the ones we have been having. It is the unpredictable nature of COVID-19 that we have seen since the beginning.

I am encouraged with some of the recent regulatory guidance coming to us from the state department of health that I sense is beginning to catch up with what seems logical to you and me. Once we have not had any positive cases for 14 days, we will be able to allow indoor family visitation. Those visits will still require scheduling, social distancing and personal protective equipment, whether or not the family has had the vaccine. While not ideal, it is a step in the right direction. As we clear the 14-day hurdle, we will notify you and share with you in more detail how those visits will take place. I hope that as more and more people are vaccinated, we will be allowed to trust the vaccines we have waited so long to receive.