



Visitation Memo to Iowa Health Care Association Members

For almost a year many families have had limited access to their loved ones who reside in nursing facilities and in assisted living programs. With the recent development of vaccines and the high rates of vaccine acceptance among nursing facility residents, many family members expected that visitation restrictions would be completely lifted. As we know, CMS has not yet revised the guidance that was issued on Sept. 17, 2020 in [QSO 20-39-NH](#). This had led to a great deal of frustration for nursing home staff, residents and families alike.

Until CMS revises the current restrictions, providers may need to be more proactive in helping residents and families become more aware of the visitation options that currently exist. Improved communication from your facility about how to connect with their loved ones may help families cope with current visitation rules until CMS issues less restrictive guidance.

IHCA believes that it is imperative that our members make sure that families are well informed of the current visitation options available to them, especially as those options change with falling county positivity rates and promise of warmer weather ahead.

Our recommendations include the following important items:

- 1. If you have not yet provided written communication to families about your current visitation status, please do so as soon as possible. If you have provided written communication, also be sure to provide additional updates frequently.** Include information about how you determine your visitation decisions; for instance, note whether your facility using CMS or Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) county positivity rates to decide visitation status. Family members may assume that your facility is using lower IPDH positivity rates and that you are unnecessarily restricting in person visits.
- 2. Clearly communicate to all residents and families the virtual communication options that are available in your facility, such as the use of smart phones, tablets, and computers, to allow families to visually connect with their loved ones on a regular basis.** CMS requires that residents and families participate in the development of resident care plans. It would be appropriate to include scheduled use of virtual devices on those individual care plans as needed or

requested by residents and families to help facilitate increased visual visits when in person visitation is not possible. Make sure to explain that residents may own and use their own devices or use devices that the facility has available.

3. Help families to understand that compassionate care visits are an option when circumstances are appropriate and not just limited to end of life or hospice situations.

The required use of compassionate care visits was much expanded in [QSO 20-39-NH](#) and may be conducted regardless of county positivity rates or if your facility is in outbreak status. ICAL guidance for compassionate care visits has also followed the QSO model. CMS examples of compassionate care visit needs include:

- A resident, who was living with their family before recently being admitted to a nursing home, is struggling with the change in environment and lack of physical family support.
- A resident who is grieving after a friend or family member recently passed away.
- A resident who needs cueing and encouragement with eating or drinking, previously provided by family and/or caregiver(s), is experiencing weight loss or dehydration.
- A resident, who used to talk and interact with others, is experiencing emotional distress, seldom speaking, or crying more frequently.

The resident's interdisciplinary team should be involved in determining the need for these visits, and it would be appropriate that the care plan or service plan indicates the need for and frequency of these visits. Providers should also consider whether it is in the best interest of a resident to have routine compassionate care visits, for example in such cases when nutritional or fluid needs exist.

IHCA recommends that you consider using IHCA's Visitation Procedures template to communicate your visitation plans to family members.