

# IT IS QUITE DIFFICULT TO HIRE NEW CARE WORKERS

*Hideyuki from Tokyo (Japan), works as a manager at nursing home Kogasaka Hikari-en*

## ALL VISITORS BANNED

It has been 8 years since our facility started its operation and we currently have 80 residents. As for our infection control measures, since 3 or 4 years ago, we have checked weekly flu information provided by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government to determine whether we should limit visitation to our facility: for instance the number and age of visitors, and places to meet residents. Last year was no exception, and we started taking measures around December 2019. Since the COVID pandemic started, however, we have banned all visitors. Some of our volunteers continue their activities, such as gardening outside the facility, because they don't have any contact with our residents. But for those who have direct contact with residents, such as those engaged in conversation, calligraphy and flower arrangement programs, we have stopped having them.

## SAFETY MEASURES

To ensure safety for our residents, we make sure each staff member wears a mask. We also avoid contact between day care and nursing home staff members as much as possible, in such places as restrooms and changing rooms. Tables in the dining room are set in a way that allows residents to have meals while facing outside instead of other residents. We also continue to provide day care and respite care services. But every time before the service starts, we check users' body temperature and make sure they don't have a fever.

## INTERNAL MEETINGS

We have an infection control committee meeting at least once every month. After the committee meeting, we have a steering committee meeting, where all the department representatives come together to discuss the issue. We make sure that each of us takes basic measures, and we ask staff members to avoid crowded places and refrain from going out to the extent possible.

## VIRTUAL FAMILY VISITS

For a few months since we stopped allowing visitors, we took pictures of our residents so that family members could see how they were doing, prepared handwritten letters, and sent

the pictures and letters to family members with our monthly bills. Later, one of the committee members suggested that we try Zoom for virtual family visits. At first, family members didn't know how to use Zoom. So, our staff members taught them how to use it and took questions over the phone. Since then, we have been able to connect with family members who live far from here. So, we think Zoom has great potential. One of the residents had a Zoom meeting with her grandchild in the UK. So far, around 10 of the 80 residents have used Zoom. Families who live close by are more likely to come to the facility and meet with residents through a window, while those living far away use Zoom.

## CHECKING IN ON VOLUNTEERS

As for local volunteers, some of them used to work almost every day, saying, "I really enjoy coming here." So, our staff members work together to make phone calls to these volunteers on a regular basis, also to check how they're doing. Before having the volunteers return, we first need to take thorough infection control measures within the facility. We plan to send information and opinions as a facility, while taking account of the information from the network in the city and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. We are thinking of engaging volunteers in new ways. For example, we may be able to use Zoom to work with listening volunteers. You know, residents' facial expressions can change when they talk with people from outside the facility. So, that idea may work. It popped in my head just now.

## MENTAL ISSUES

Since I'm also in charge of health management, I listen to staff members when they have mental issues. I have been hearing some complaints from them since a state of emergency was declared. I usually tell them that self-restraint is a request from the government, not an order, so they should be able to go out as long as they avoid crowded places and wear a mask. Right now, it is quite difficult to hire new care workers. We have to rely on staffing agencies.

## SHARING INFORMATION

Our suppliers have been really reliable, and we have deeply trusted them since before the COVID pandemic. But this pandemic has reminded us how valuable they are. When we had a hard time securing masks, sanitizer, and gloves because of the problems with availability and prices, we consulted these suppliers. They worked really hard to make sure we had enough supplies. We also exchange information with other nursing homes. There is a network of care facilities in the city of Machida, so we share information there. This was also helpful when we started virtual visits via Zoom and family visits through a window.

*Hideyuki was interviewed in September 2020. His story was shared with us by **International Longevity Center (ILC) Japan** – 国際長寿センター, member of the ILC Global Alliance, an international federation researching and advocating the vitality and the societal and*

*economical position of older people. In the Netherlands, the ILC network is represented by Leyden Academy.*