

IT SEEMS THAT EACH GROUP HOME HAS DIFFERENT POLICIES

Your group home allows family members to visit residents while taking infection control measures. How have you been handling the situation at your day care center?

"We take each user's body temperature and disinfect their hands every morning when we pick them up by our van. We make sure to properly ventilate the van when we drive from and to their houses. Once they arrive at our center, we take their temperature again and make sure the place is properly ventilated. These are the basic measures we take, and we do these over and over every day. We also asked users with cold-like or allergic symptoms to stop coming to the center for a while. Since many users cancelled the service especially from March to May, it was easier to avoid a crowd than usual. We made sure that users kept distance from each other, including when they sat and when they did exercise. When they sang, we had them line up side by side to prevent droplet infection."

What about the home care service? Are masks and gloves the basic measures?

"Yes. On the morning of the day our staff members visit, we have users take their body temperature. Each home care worker wears a mask and bring a set of tools to prevent infection, including disposable gloves, hand sanitizer, and a gown. Masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer are the basic items. But another thing that may significantly contribute to prevention is that we ask users with fever or cold-like symptoms to cancel the service."

Was there any difference between regular infection control measures and those to handle the COVID pandemic?

"Once we got more information about the virus, we have been taking almost the same measures as usual flu prevention. But before evidence became available, we didn't know what would work effectively. So, we took stricter measures than usual, to be on the safe side. We took body temperature, sprayed hand sanitizer, and disinfected common spaces more often."

Have you seen any changes in staff members as their workload increased due to the pandemic?

"They take extra precautions not just at work, but also in everyday life. I've heard that they have been restraining themselves from eating with a large number of people and going out. To show our appreciation as an employer, we have taken such measures as encouraging them to take paid leave and paying a bonus."

Has any of your staff members come to you to talk about their mental issues?

"In March and April, home care workers often told us that they were worried about the possibility that they might infect service users. In that sense, our staff members may have felt more mental strain than usual. Looking back, our employees have worked very hard to prevent infection while leveraging their expertise, both at work and at home."

Regarding relationships with the community, have you had any problems or new discoveries?

"We have seen significant changes regarding the events our group home residents participate in (for example boccia games, running events, and gatherings for people with dementia) since the COVID outbreak. But as a corporation, we continue to work closely with the neighborhood association, including disaster drills and cleaning of parks. So, I think we can maintain relationships with the community while taking measures to prevent infection. While we try to build new lifestyles to coexist with COVID-19, the municipality and some volunteer groups have stopped almost all of their activities. Consequently, we have lost the connection with these places for now."

How about the use of Zoom and smartphones to stay connected with the community?

"Since the COVID outbreak, a social gathering program for older people in the community has been suspended. Some participants in their 70s exchange ideas and opinions via the LINE app, just like teleconferences. We have also restarted the gathering while limiting the number of participants."

Have any community residents criticized that you continue to organize activities while they restrain themselves?

"No, not at all. We now organize the activities in the facility, but those are what we used to do in the community, outside of the facility. We've just moved them to the inside of the facility. So, we have never received any criticism or complaints. Rather, many people have praised our relaxed and free styles."

How do you currently work with the volunteers who used to come to the facility?

"In general, we do not take any volunteers now. Someone proposed that we might be able to have listening volunteers via Zoom. But we decided not to do that, because most of our residents are with severe dementia and it would be too difficult to have conversation online. Some volunteers have asked us, 'Can we restart soon? We would like to do such and such activities.' But to be honest, we would rather not have too many unspecified people inside the facility for now. After careful examination of evidence, we have determined that we should be able to have family members visit the facility but not volunteers."

In the local network of group homes, have you talked about family visitation policies and/or shared any other information?

"There are 21 group homes in the city of Machida, and the network has a meeting frequently, but not regularly. I'm not sure what they discuss at the network meeting, but I have received phone calls from other group homes, asking how our home was handling the situation. In that sense, we did have horizontal collaboration. As for the network of care managers, we did share the process to obtain family members' consent. We then shared that with the network of day care centers and then with other service units within the corporation. With other members of those networks, we communicated at the individual level. For example, we asked some network members about how to handle a certain situation. We also made arrangements with another service provider so that one could take the other's users in case a COVID case was found and the service needed to be suspended. In another case, we asked another day care center if they had any vacancy. It seems that each group home has different policies and responds to this challenge differently. The one near our home didn't accept any visitor at all. It all depends on how the corporation thinks of the situation."

Kazuhiro 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.