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Dear Residents, Families and Staff:

On 11/1/2020, we published a notice that we were notified by the Nevada State Lab that three individuals who had worked or trained at Alta tested positive for COVID-19. This letter is a follow-up to that letter. The facility conducted confirmatory stat PCR testing immediately after receiving the positive results, although the results of the PCR test can take a few days to return results, so we didn't immediately know the re-test outcomes. During this time, three additional staff members had positive test results, bringing the total to six. After receiving the positive PCR results, all six of the individuals had subsequent negative Antigen tests multiple times, however, those individuals remained off of the schedule. Within 72 hours, we received the re-test PCR test results for all six individuals, which showed five negative test results and one positive. PCR testing is over 99% accurate.

Over the past few weeks especially, the leadership team at Alta has been discussing COVID-19 testing protocols and the community infection rate. Additionally, our team has consulted with public health experts, laboratory experts, and state CMS surveyors. We are putting together this fairly extensive letter to explain some common questions that we are hearing. Our letter consists of evidence from scientific studies, the CDC, and personal communications with experts.

1) What is the difference between PCR and Antigen testing?

This is an oversimplification of what these two tests are, but it is important that everyone understand some of the basic nomenclature, as it has become a common part of all of our lives. PCR stands for Polymerase Chain Reaction testing and is also known as molecular testing. When a sample is tested for PCR, the laboratory technicians will multiply any viral RNA particle by the thousands or even millions. When a test returns PCR positive, it means that the person had virus particles for COVID-19 and could potentially be actively infected. Using PCR tests, we know with high certainty that virus particles are detected in the specimen, but we cannot tell how contagious the person is. To identify if a person is contagious, we conduct an assessment of symptoms and potential exposure. We test our staff and residents for COVID-19 according to CMS guidelines using PCR testing. PCR tests are the gold standard of testing. Although the test is run in about 45 minutes, Alta has been averaging receiving

results within 2-7 days. There are significant delays at the labs; and we have had instances where we have not received test results for 9 days. We are currently using the Nevada State Public Health Lab to run the majority of Alta's PCR tests. We can't emphasize enough how appreciative we are of the Public Health Lab's partnership, but it's also important for us to communicate how we do not have direct control over when we will receive results.

A COVID-19 antigen test detects the presence of a COVID-19 protein. The test can be completed in 15 minutes and Alta has the capacity to conduct antigen tests on-site. Antigen tests have a variety of accuracy with the average antigen test being approximately 56% accurate (Dinnes, et al. 2020. *Rapid, point-of-care antigen and molecular-based tests for diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 infection*). The two manufacturers for antigen testing that we have at Alta are Abbott and BD Veritor. These machines claim 98% and 88% accuracy, however, the accuracy varies and is most accurate if the individual has COVID-19 symptoms. We use antigen testing for screening residents who are symptomatic and staff who are thought to have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.

2) What is a false positive and a weak positive result?

A false positive means the test shows positive, although the person is actually negative. Since the antigen tests have poor reliability results, a false positive can happen with antigen testing. With the PCR test, it is more likely that a person could have a weak positive result. A weak positive result means that COVID-19 was detected, but potentially the person had an almost undetectable viral load. Because the labs are not running viral load testing, we cannot be certain that someone is weakly positive, but we can suspect that a person is weakly positive if they are asymptomatic and have negative PCR results in the 7 days before and 7 days after their positive result. Although, we can't say for certain, we suspect that weakly positive people are not contagious.

3) What is the status of the COVID-19 vaccine?

Clinical trials on the Pfizer vaccine are promising, demonstrating a 90% efficacy in preventing catching the virus. Alta is signed up to acquire the vaccine when the vaccine becomes available. We have no insight into when this will be. When the COVID-19 vaccine becomes available, we will provide more information about the science and merits of the vaccination.

4) What are the plans going forward relative to visitation, communal activities and dining?

The most recent positivity rates in Washoe County are above 15% and they are continuing to trend upwards. This means that for every 20 people tested in the county, 3 people have the virus. In Washoe County, the virus is spreading rapidly and hospitalizations have more than doubled in the past few weeks. These high community positivity rates and hospitalizations impact the nursing home. The high community positivity rate and chance that COVID-19 could be spread by people who are asymptomatic or presymptomatic presents a vulnerable risk for visitation as families may unknowingly expose a resident and spread COVID-19 within our facility. The following restrictions will be in place until the facility has been able to hold 14 days of being COVID-free and the county positivity rate drops below 10%:

- Currently, all staff are wearing and will continue to wear N95 masks.
- Visitation from family members and friends will be restricted, other than compassionate care and essential need situations.
- Non essential appointments will be cancelled.
- Communal dining will reopen for the Assisted Dining Room, but not the main dining room.


- Communal activities will be kept at 5 people per activity, with masks enforced.

With the county positivity rate so high, it is likely that we will continue to have positive tests, and as such, we are going to have restrictions. Because it is so hard to control the flow of such rapidly changing information, we encourage each and every one of you:

- 1) Day to day test results will be available by calling the hotline at 775-241-4620. We will update this hotline with the positive results day-to-day as they are received.
- 2) Due to the rapidly changing nature of total test results, visit <https://nvhealthresponse.nv.gov/> to see an up to date count of how many cases are active and resolved in the facility.
- 3) Please check the website, www.altanursingandrehab.com, regularly, for more verbose correspondence. Letters will be uploaded to this webpage with a summary of what is happening within the facility, including test results and active plans.
- 4) Please check the Facebook page regularly, as updates are posted there frequently.
- 5) If you have scheduled family visits, via video or in person, please work with the telehealth/televisit department for the most up to date information/status. They can be reached at the front desk, during normal business hours.
- 6) Please do your part to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by socially distancing, limiting travel, wearing masks, and washing hands frequently.

If you have questions, please **CALL** Kim Lee, the DON or Zach Gray, the Administrator. Our goal is to keep you all safe and healthy. We care about you, your families and the staff very much.

Sincerely,



Zach Gray, NHA
(518) 852-3255