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Dr. Julie Smirl Provides Insight into Challenges Facing Senior Living Industry Workers

Dr. Julie Smirl recognizes how the senior living industry is struggling to keep up with the challenges that have faced many communities since the initial outbreak of COVID-19. Here she offers some help and advice for those leaders that are dealing with the health and well-being of seniors.

Written by: Olivia Beaton

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The COVID-19 pandemic has posed extreme challenges for Senior Living Communities across the country. The biggest concern for facilities has been implementing precautions and procedures to assure the safety of all residents. The staff in senior living communities have been a part of the front-line workers battling COVID-19 and have had to quickly adapt to the unimaginable. Dr. Smirl, Assistant Professor in Bradley University’s [Online Masters of Counseling Program](#) has in-depth insights on the challenges facing senior care workers as well as how to overcome them.

Dr. Smirl has witnessed several obstacles that senior community staff members have had to overcome during the pandemic. Typically, senior living communities have several shifts of workers coming in to assist in the care for the residents, which can cause an increased opportunity for exposure to COVID-19, both for the staff and for the residents. By implementing safety and cleaning protocols, facilities can reduce the possibility of exposure.

Smirl says, “these facilities are often are understaffed, which increases stress on the workers and the patients who rely on their care.” The care providers have become oftentimes not only the sole care providers but also the sole interactions that the residents have during this time of isolation. The increased responsibilities sparked by the pandemic create higher stress levels, as workers feel they have to provide both emotional and physical support at a higher rate. While selflessly taking care of others, staff also have had to carry on with fears of taking home the virus to family members or becoming ill themselves.

With these added challenges and stressors in mind, Dr. Smirl has seen successful ways that facilities can support their workers and adapt to the quickly changing environment. She suggests that “administration can provide support for their staff in many ways to assist with providing breaks from added stress.”

Some methods include providing self-care activities and coping skills to aid them in taking care of their own

well-being so that they can come to work each day refreshed and able to continue to care for the residents. Another way to alleviate stress from both staff and residents is to utilize technology to keep connections to the outside world. Dr. Smirl encourages communities to use technology as a resource to keep residents engaged socially with family members and friends so they are not solely reliant on staff for social interaction.

As we move forward, Dr. Smirl believes that facilities will need to continue to adapt as the times change. She says, “facilities will need to continue to plan for the provision of sufficient staff to provide increased care based on the ever-changing needs of their patients.” And for staff, she suggests providing opportunities to acknowledge and appreciate them for their continuous dedication and outstanding efforts.



Responsible Control of Public Health Pests is Essential During the COVID-19 Response

Household pests can spread disease and create general discomfort even in the best of times, however the seniors that live in assisted living have more to deal with since the coronavirus has become so prevalent in the U.S. Here are some tips to keep your living spaces free of these common pests.

Written by: Joseph Latino

7/23/2020

With stay-at-home orders still in place in many states, and many senior living communities closed to the general public, public health structural pests such as bedbugs, roaches and rodents are proliferating because of increased accessibility to their preferred food sources. All of these contribute to worsening allergic asthma symptoms and related breathing complications, which may lead to more severe cases of COVID-19 in older adults, who have a [mortality rate five times younger people with asthma](#).

Although pest control has been deemed an essential service by Homeland Security and the vast majority of states during the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns over maintaining social distancing and possible exposure to the coronavirus has significantly slowed, or stopped, treatments for these internal structural pests. This has created a fertile breeding ground for bedbugs, roaches and rodents, especially in senior living environs.

There is a need to strike the “right” balance between preserving public health through preventive and focused pest control and not causing undue exposure risk to senior living residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bedbugs

Bedbugs require frequent blood meals to grow into adulthood and reproduce. Within several months, one pregnant female can result in more than 30,000 bedbugs. If left unaddressed, bedbugs will spread throughout a community, affecting the lives of all co-residents.

Bedbugs also prefer to feed while being undisturbed — for example, when people are sleeping or resting for extended periods on a couch, and while watching TV. Stay-at-home social behavior has provided plenty of opportunities for bedbugs to feed. Sadly, those affected by the coronavirus who are too sick to get out of bed provide the ideal bedbug victim. Resulting bites, when repeatedly scratched, can lead to infections that further complicate the condition of the person.

So what can you do?

As senior living communities enhance their disinfection efforts, consider including building-wide bedbug detection and treatment wherever necessary and instituting preventive strategies. Taking proactive steps now to prevent bedbugs will improve the quality of life for residents and staff members and create great savings down the road.

Rodents and roaches

Rodent activity is on the uptick throughout the country. Increased food storage, food waste and delayed garbage removal provide ample food sources for these pests to grow quickly in number. National experts in the control of rodents note that, as quarantines continue and restaurants remain closed in some areas, rodent activity is likely to rise in many environments, including senior housing. For the same reasons, the frequency of roach infestations are increasing. Untreated, in three to four months, a roach population can multiply by more than 600 times and will continue to expand exponentially without periodic pest control maintenance and proper cleaning procedures.

Solution

Delaying treatment and the implementation of preventive programs has created an explosion of infestations, which dangerously increases the levels of allergens for residents subject to asthma and related allergies, increasing health problems, psychological distress and disruptions caused by these pests.

If pest management professionals are not engaged to control these public health pests, then some residents may resort to “do-it-yourself” pest control, including the improper use of household chemicals that are ineffective and often dangerous. Many of these chemicals are highly flammable and can compromise those with breathing difficulties, and some treatments actually may enhance the resistance of these pests to traditional chemical treatments, making treatment less effective and more time-consuming.

In trying to control the delicate balance between the short-term needs of preventing the spread of COVID-19 and securing public safety through responsible pest control, the unintended hazards of deferring treatments for public health pests must be recognized. Even in the short- and medium term, adopting preventive strategies now, using well-documented integrated pest management-based protocols, will reduce the need for contact time between residents and pest management service providers by 50% to 65%.

And let’s remember, pest management professionals are just that, professionals. Using well-established COVID-19 hygiene guidelines to treat senior living communities while implementing preventive programs will significantly reduce the problems caused by these public health pests.

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Senior Living Groups Among 49 Calling for 'Robust' Federal Funding for COVID-19 Testing

Senior Living owners and advocates are making their voices heard in our nation's capital. Congressional leaders are deciding the fate of the funding that is sent to different organizations around the country for aid in dealing with the COVID crisis.

Written by: Lois A. Bowers

7/27/2020

LeadingAge, AMDA—The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine and the American Health Care Association are among 49 organizations urging Congress to prioritize “robust” federal funding for COVID-19 testing in future pandemic relief legislation.

“Swift action is needed to ensure that every American, especially essential workers, frontline healthcare physicians and other clinicians and those at disproportionate risk for COVID-19 have access to vital COVID-19 testing, whether for diagnostic, occupational, return-to-school, public health or virus monitoring purposes,” the organizations told Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) in [a recent letter](#).

Such testing will be necessary to meet the goal of “safely reopening the economy and returning to normal business” and should be made available regardless of individuals’ insurance coverage status or purpose for receiving the test, said the business and healthcare organizations signing the July 21 letter, which also included the Business Roundtable, the Healthcare Leadership Council and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

“Without such funding, and with demand increasing, Americans will only see a reduction in access to testing, as well as disruptions in clinician, hospital, and laboratory payments, diminished public health surveillance capacity, and higher insurance premiums – all while millions of Americans begin to seek testing in exponential numbers to facilitate return to work, school and other normal activities,” they said.

Funding as well as “clear coverage guidelines,” the groups said, “are critical for the scale and degree of testing that is needed to reopen, to reduce the risk of transmission, and to understand the progression of the disease and aid in development of better treatments and vaccines.”

LeadingAge President and CEO Katie Smith Sloan, in reference to the letter, said: “If Congress wants to head off more catastrophe, the new legislation needs to put older adults and their care providers at the front of the line, right alongside hospitals, for life-saving resources like personal protective equipment and testing. It must include funding and support for aging services providers that ensure the health and safety of older adults.”