

My week living with dementia in a nursing home

'Lockdown has highlighted how it was before the pandemic'

My name is Lyn Rogers and I have been a permanent resident in a nursing home in the state of Victoria in Australia for over two years.

I have a diagnosis of dementia and live with other comorbidities, like most people over the age of 65. I moved to the facility from Queensland, therefore most of my family and friends are not living nearby, and although I use a crutch to walk, it is essential I maintain my regular exercise routine.

For many weeks during this pandemic, I was denied the right to walk, and had to write a formal letter of complaint, which was taken to management, the owners of the facility, and eventually ended up with the Minister of Health. Hence, although the week I have highlighted below says I have been walking every day, this was not the case for a long time during lockdown!

Whilst it is not my preferred place of residence, as I would prefer to live independently in my own home, I felt it was an important decision to make due to living alone, and not wanting to place the burden on my family as my dementia or other health issues progress. This is how life is for me and other residents, since the Coronavirus pandemic. Since the Coronavirus pandemic, I have been denied the right to maintain my regular exercise, which is walking daily in the Botanical Gardens nearby. Here is an example of my life in a nursing home during COVID-19.

Monday

It is Monday, and another week in lockdown begins. As usual, breakfast was at 7.30am. Straight after breakfast, and most days now, well, since I took my 'case' to the management, and the Minister, and am allowed to go walking again, I go walking daily in the Botanical Gardens nearby. I then have my regular physiotherapy for 15 minutes, and after that, join my online peer to peer support group, which is run by **Dementia Alliance International**. Engaging with my peers, who all live with dementia, has empowered me to live more positively, and to speak up for my human rights. On Mondays, we also have 'whiteboard games' which I love, and which are better than sitting staring out of the window.

Tuesday

Well, I got out of bed again today, and to be very honest, Tuesday it is no different to Monday. We

have no activities person on Tuesdays, so at times, residents are left sitting at the breakfast table until almost lunch time, which is infuriating for me to see. My worry, is although this is not happening to me today (or this week), will it be what happens when I can no longer advocate for myself? Before the pandemic we had an activities coordinator three days a week, since the coronavirus, it is four days a week. This is hardly enough, and I worry it will be dropped back to three days a week after the pandemic.

Wednesday

It is Wednesday, which is a better day than usual. Like every other day, I now walk in the Gardens, and we have singing and music after lunch, and since the coronavirus, we have another extra happy hour... Woo hoo! Yet again, a happy hour but with limits. 2 glasses of wine are all we can have, which is of course, a healthy limit, but cask wine is not very expensive, so it seems a bit mean! Carpet bowls is also on Wednesdays, but is not always a meaningful activity, as all I can do is score, and it highlights the other residents' frustrations!

Thursday

Thursday means it is one more day to get to the weekend. Which sadly is not anything to be excited about as it means the isolation of the week, is intensified as activities are switched off on weekends! Unfortunately, this is not an exaggeration! I do my washing, go for my walk, and watch the increase in the distress of the other residents - which are in fact, normal human responses' - and they are even more isolated and lonely than usual.

Friday

Fridays continue to be similar to all other days; breakfast, a walk in the gardens, physio, and another happy hour with a quiz, not dissimilar to reminiscing, but which I enjoy. I also have another peer to peer support group with DAI, which helps me keep sane. All days include dinner at 5pm, and supper at 7pm - if I was not living in a nursing home, I'd most likely eat dinner after 7pm, so this is a childlike timeline for adults!!!

And then I have to face dreaded Weekends!!!

Well, apart from an extra walk, and listening to more audio books, most of my weekends are very boring, and this one is no different!

