

Message

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Sent: 07/05/2020 16:36:26
To: TEO EIS MinisterialCases [eis.submissions@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk]
Subject: Transcript: Covid-19 in care homes, Nolan Show, 7.5.20 - 0904 (final transcript including Dr Connor Bamford)

For TRIM please

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From: DoF EIS Media Monitoring Unit
Sent: 07 May 2020 16:33
Subject: Covid-19 in care homes, Nolan Show, 7.5.20 - 0904 (final transcript including Dr Connor Bamford)

Programme	Nolan Show		
Date & Time	7.5.20 - 0904		
Subject	Covid-19 in care homes		
Prepared By	Typist:	NR	
	MMU:	KC	

STEPHEN NOLAN

This is a significant story today, this week the DoH put its Covid-19 information dashboard back up but we were curious as to why there was no information on that dashboard about what is going on in our care homes. This morning the Nolan Show is going to place information in the public domain which the DoH have not and which they are not telling you the public. We have been asking for many, many days now for the Covid infection rates per care home, they wouldn't tell us and we have found out by other means. Some of you may be shocked by these numbers, here is what the DoH has failed to place in the public domain. There is a care home in NI where 36 out of the 38 residents have tested positive for Covid-19. When we asked a very senior medical practitioner what about the other two he said it is only a matter of time until they get it. Most of them will die he said. Now that is not good enough. The Nolan Show can also tell you today there is another nursing home in NI where 29 out of the 49 residents have been tested positive and another where 36 out of the 72 residents are Covid positive.

The fact that the authorities have not placed this information in the public domain raises significant questions. What happened to the fullest transparency possible that Robin Swann, our Health

Minister, promised us? Have all the families and next of kin been told of the significant outbreaks in these homes? Will the DoH now publish the names of these homes? Why would they not?

I want you to imagine if you are the son or the daughter of the two residents in that care home where 36 of the total population of 38 have the virus, have you the right to know that your loved one is surrounded by every other resident with that virus? If you were that son or daughter and you did know you would be asking very specific questions wouldn't you about how your elderly parent was being protected? And remember it is entirely possible that your elderly parent or grandmother would be total protected but you would be asking pretty significant questions if you knew that 36 out of a total population of 38 were infected and it comes back to that fundamental question, why hasn't the DoH put this information in the public domain? Why is it taking a radio show to do so?

Remember the story, 36 out of 38 residents in one nursing home, 29 out of 49 in another, 36 out of 72 in another. The Commissioner for Older People, Eddie Lynch, joining us this morning, your reaction?

EDDIE LYNCH

Well my reaction is really that these are extremely worrying figures that you are revealing this morning and I think it raises a number of questions that you know to highlight the need for better and more transparent information from government. This is the most worrying time that you can imagine for the families of the people who are living in care homes right across NI. This is a time when families more than ever before have been asked to really place their confidence in the system because we have had a time now for many, many weeks when families aren't able to visit their loved ones, aren't able to go into the home and this for me has meant that communication has never been more important with families from homes to let them know what is going on, what has happened within the four walls of the home. And it raises a question around transparency from government and the figures about how this information is being communicated and I think the absence of information increases concerns but also starts to dent at the confidence of families in relation to the care being provided and a system that they are putting their trust in so it is extremely worrying these figures, it raises the question again about the level of information being provided. As I said before it was only a few weeks ago....

STEPHEN NOLAN

Were you told as the Commissioner for Older People?

EDDIE LYNCH

No. I am only hearing these figures this morning along with every other person listening to your show. I am only getting the information that is going out publicly on a Friday from NISRA, only three weeks ago that information wasn't even being reported in terms of deaths in care homes....

STEPHEN NOLAN

And they wouldn't break down and the authorities have not broken down the numbers per home, we are doing that this morning. And for that nursing home and these are up to date figures by the way, these are this week's figures, it is a statement of fact that there is a nursing home in NI where 36 out of 38 residents have tested positive for Covid and there are big questions around what about the other two residents? What should happen to them? Are they being isolated? Remember the RQIA is not going in on the ground, we have had no evidence that they are, they have set up a call centre, what about those other two residents?

EDDIE LYNCH

Absolutely I think that is a very reasonable and fair question that you are posing it for and I think you ask the question if that was your mother or father in that home and they were the only ones in the home without Covid you (unclear) and this is why, every person affected by this is a human being and with a family behind them and real time worries at the most serious times that they will have faced and we owe it as a society that we are providing as much information in a timely way, in an appropriate way to all families of every resident in care homes across NI given the confidence that they know what is happening, they know their loved ones are being looked after. For me again we can't highlight enough how hard the care home workers have been working over the last few months. They have been in a really difficult job, sometimes left with very challenging conditions to provide brilliant care and treatment but that is not enough. I have been calling for universal rolling programme of testing now for many weeks as one measure to try to identify infections in homes at an earlier stage so that actions can be taken to minimise the spread and protect those who haven't got it and it is just one tool of many that every home in NI have to try to protect as many people as possible. What I would say is, and it is important to make this point, that the level of infections don't necessarily mean definite number of deaths. We are hearing many stories of older people who are recovering from Covid-19 as well and it is good to hear those stories. But we need to be doing more

to hear more of those stories but unfortunately we do know how serious this is once it gets into care home settings, we do know how vulnerable these people are to this terrible coronavirus and that is why everything has to be done. This is clearly the frontline, the Minister has said this is the frontline in the Covid fight now....

STEPHEN NOLAN

But why hasn't he placed these figures in the public domain? Why would he not do that? Has this dented your confidence in the DoH's promise to be as transparent as possible?

EDDIE LYNCH

I have been calling for them to be as transparent as possible, when the figures started coming out a few weeks back I did ask as well would there be further breakdown of the information by geographical locations, identifying clusters, where they can provide information would that be provided? And I was assured that as more information became available that they would, they would certainly seek to provide the public with more detailed information about where the outbreaks were and the level of them. That is a question again I think for the DoH, what information they have? I understand care homes are reporting on a daily basis to the department on the number of Covid outbreaks that are happening. So that information should be available and it is a question for the department and for the Minister about why they are not publishing that if there is a reason for not publishing they come out and explain that. But my deep concern at the minute is with every older person living in a care home across NI and the family members who must be going through hell at the minute frankly. When they hear these sort of stories that there are bigger outbreaks than previously reported it obviously will raise real concerns in them about their loved ones and they need our support and they need government to be doing everything they can to support them and their families at this time.

STEPHEN NOLAN

Does this dent your confidence in the DoH promise to be transparent? They have had these figures and they have not put them into the public domain.

EDDIE LYNCH

Never mind myself I think the bigger question here is by not providing this information the public of NI need to have confidence in the health system here. They need to have confidence that government is levelling with them on the nature of this, the danger to their loved ones, the situation on the ground. I do believe that when you have an option of information being provided the natural consequence of that will be a denting of confidence of everybody and that is where the challenge is I think for government now that they have to respond to this and be clear with the public about the scale of outbreak in homes, the strategy for dealing with it, which I again will reiterate the need for universal rolling programme of testing for staff and residents. And they need to be coming out with that action plan to give that confidence to the public that everything possible is being done.

STEPHEN NOLAN

I see you are describing this as shocking figures about the rate of infection?

MARIE LOUISE CONNOLLY

Yes this is something that we have all I think as journalists been trying to get to the bottom of over the last couple of weeks and this focus very much has shifted away from the hospitals and onto care homes and for the last month we have heard people like Pauline Shepherd and others and care homes saying that everything that has come their way they have had to shout about it, for instance the PPE, that went on for many, many weeks, extra staffing that has also come about because it had to be brought to people's attention that they need the staffing and we are also very aware speaking to individual care homes that the rate of infection is incredibly high. I am not sure whether the department would say that they should be publishing information on individual homes because there is a certain degree of protecting homes anonymity and also protecting the identity of people within those homes but when you are dealing with a pandemic and when the tracing and tracking and trying to manage that pandemic relies totally on information I think perhaps what could have been released was to the degree of what many, many homes are having to deal with and having to challenge.

I spoke to a home last night who said that they were battling something that they couldn't see, that they were short staffed, that they were in a home where there was Covid-19, that many of the staff were just basically working round the clock, that they felt that they had been neglected at the start of all of this and were constantly chasing their tail. So this information is critical. It is shocking that out of 38 residents 36 have positive. What I feel about all of this is there is no need for people to feel stigmatised or and this is a message that we got across very much at the start of all this when people,

unlike swine flu, I think because of the name, and the way in which it was portrayed back then in 2009 people were almost ashamed to say they had it, but this is completely different and we have had the public from the very, very start putting their hands up saying I have this. The same should be with care homes too. There is nothing wrong with saying that there is coronavirus in a home, but I suppose these are businesses and these care home owners are afraid to say that they have it in case it affects their business.

STEPHEN NOLAN

Some of the questions which are obvious and yet vital questions, are all the families being informed or are they just being told there is an outbreak of Covid in your mum or dad's care home? There is a hell of difference from that and someone being told your mum doesn't have it and one other person doesn't but 36 of the 38 do. I wonder, are they telling these families?

MARIE LOUISE CONNOLLY

The two care homes that I have reported on in the past couple of weeks we know that all of the families weren't being told when there were cases and indeed when there were deaths. The care homes have said well that could be a case because things were happening so quickly but the families that contacted me after our stories went out on Newsline, was that we deserve to know, we should know because this is so difficult, we are not getting into the homes at the moment because of the lockdown, so therefore we need all the information that we can get. And yes it would be very worrying to know that your mum or dad or aunt or uncle or granny is in a home with Covid-19 but at least you are aware of the facts. So while the DoH, and I am sure they will say this that it is not up to them to publish the names of each individual home, what we haven't been able to get is this idea of just how ferocious this virus is now travelling through many of our care homes and I think that is the level of information that we need to get and that level of just how serious it is. My goodness we had the PM yesterday talking about just how serious it is and how much he regrets the epidemic in care homes and I think we now need that level of transparency and clarity and also to be addressing it in public on care homes and the department will say that it has, that Robin Swann has addressed it, that the CMO has addressed it but are we hearing enough about it? In Dublin at the daily conferences there they are talking all the time about what is happening in care homes and I think we need that level of people within the DoH, PHA, others taking questions on this perhaps every day.

STEPHEN NOLAN

To summarise this morning, we are placing in the public domain the fact that there is a nursing home in NI where 36 out of the 38 residents have been tested positive for Covid-19, none of these figures have been released publicly by the DoH, 29 in another home where there are a total of 49 people, 36 in another home out of a total of 72 people. Dr Alan Stout, the Chair of BMA NI's GP committee, a leader virologist at Queen's University has described this Alan as deeply worrying, the Commissioner for Older People is saying the same thing, what is your reaction?

DR ALAN STOUT

I think these are both important and I think actually as Marie Louise has just said very sensitive figures, but I suppose an important other slant to give on them is probably two fold. One is that they are quite reassuring because I think what these figures are showing and reflecting is the change in terms of the testing in nursing homes and that changed quite recently from needing to have a small cluster of cases in a nursing home to have any sort of widespread testing whereas now we have moved to if there is one case in a nursing home, all patients and all staff are swabbed and tested and so we are inevitably going to see these numbers increase but I think Marie Louise said as well it doesn't necessarily mean that every single patient who tests positive is seriously unwell. And in fact in some people they test positive and they are not unwell at all, they just happen to be positive and not unwell but of course it is a vulnerable group and some will become very, very unwell. But the second very important thing about having these figures is what it does allow us to do is then plan the care that is provided and the support it has provided whenever we see those numbers in those clusters so these are figures that are shared throughout the system, by the Trust....

STEPHEN NOLAN

Why is the public not being told?

DR ALAN STOUT

I don't know that answer but certainly from my involvement you know it is very much about planning care and what we have done is very quickly shifted the model and changed the model so what happens whenever we see a pattern like this or we see an increased number the Trust will provide infection control advice and support to the home, they will provide additional nursing support and additional staff support but we also changed the medical model that goes to the home and again this

is a very recent thing where we create a much more kind of proactive model where you have a dedicated visit if it is required to a patient who is becoming unwell at any particular time but you can also move to a proactive ward round where the home is contacted on each day or once or twice a day to pick up on any problems before problems escalate and before problems change so it is really, really important that we have these figures so that we can do this planning around this.

STEPHEN NOLAN

It was said to me very recently that the two people in that home where the 36 others have it, it is only a matter of time until they get it, would you concur with that?

DR ALAN STOUT

What we know is that it is a vulnerable group of people, they are in very close contact with each other and all of the staff, so it is a very enclosed environment, so the rapid spread through a nursing home is not a surprise, it was something that was seen right throughout the UK, something we have seen right throughout the world. I don't want to use the word inevitability but whenever you get all but two patients in one home infected it almost becomes a surprise that those other two don't become infected....

STEPHEN NOLAN

So is it naïve of me to ask the question at the point at which the authorities identified 36 out of 38 people were infected, should we be even contemplating moving the two other people out? Is that a naïve question?

DR ALAN STOUT

Any number of things is looked at in that instance, so one is how you isolate them within the home and how you protect them and actually homes are quite good and quite well versed at this from previous outbreaks of norovirus or C-diff or MRSA so they know all of the different measures and the protocols, so there is a possibility of trying to protect them within the home. There is the option of potentially moving them but there is big risk involved in moving some of these patients at certain times and in most cases they are better just to stay where they are. But there is also an option if patients if the home is really struggling to deal with some of the more unwell patients there is an

option to potentially move them elsewhere. But by in large in the nursing home and residential home population the patients are much, much better to stay where they are and be managed where they are because it is moving an additional treatment and all of the complications that come with that can be just as difficult.

STEPHEN NOLAN

The point I would make to you is this, the RQIA, the regulator is not going on the ground to inspect homes. The DoH despite promising transparency is not publishing the individual figures of the spread of Covid in individual homes we are, without that information where is that test that public scrutiny often applies in this situation, where is it? Why wouldn't they publish these figures? And if it is as predictable as you say it is why have they not put these figures on the dashboard because they have calculated them, they are in a table, they have them?

DR ALAN STOUT

And I think Eddie alluded to that, that each nursing home is giving a return every day. I don't know the answer to that to be perfectly honest with you. These are changing figures, are they saying that the testing has actually changed so these are relatively new figures. And I suspect the plan is to put them on the dashboard and make them more transparent but I don't know the detail on that and I don't know any of the planning on that.

STEPHEN NOLAN

And what is the likelihood of survival for elderly people in a care home where there is an outbreak to that extent? I think we should be open and frank with the public.

DR ALAN STOUT

So again nursing homes by definition are a group of our most vulnerable members of society. There has been a lot of work over the past number of years in terms of when and why a patient is admitted to a nursing home and they will be approaching their end of life, again just purely on definition, and many of them will die from other things over the next number of months, next one or two years. And in fact some of the most recent statistics show that the actual life expectancy of somebody going into a nursing home in NI, in Belfast in particular has reduced quite considerably over the last number of

years and that was simply because people are going in at a later stage. So whenever you get an infection like this it can become a terminal event. But again go back to the CMO he stated before and quite rightly that in this particular category of the public of patients you will get some will die of Covid-19 and some will die with Covid-19, so in other words some will have tested positive for Covid-19 we will now that they are positive for Covid-19 but they will die for another reason, again it is just the nature of that vulnerable group of patients.

STEPHEN NOLAN

It is the nature of that vulnerable group of patients but I am minded to also say that elderly people are no different in terms of their rights, their rights to access medical care, their rights to be treated the same as any other citizen in NI and let me tell you if there was a 20 or a 30 or a 40 year old in an environment where 36 out of the 38 people had Covid-19 I think I would want my family to know and we are doing this now because this story is breaking this morning, I am going to ask the DoH and we will put this question in right now, can they give us an assurance that all families have been told before we broke this story today that these outbreaks and the numbers, because the numbers are important, that the families have been told of the data within these outbreaks. We will see what we get back from the DoH and we are also asking them why they haven't made this information publicly available.

JOE

The initial question is, when did you find out these precise figures?

STEPHEN NOLAN

I am not prepared to reveal that but I can tell you....

JOE

You see that is part of the issue....

STEPHEN NOLAN

I need to protect my sources around this story but I can tell you this....

JOE

Don't be talking over me. What you are making is a serious accusation. But you have got to tell the people when you found out these figures. Why? I know Robin Swann he is a decent man and I don't think he is the sort of boy who would conceal.....

STEPHEN NOLAN

What I can tell you is because this is important, I can tell you that these are up to date figures for the week of 4 May, just a few days ago. I can tell you that these are real, this is not an accusation, this is fact, there is a nursing home in NI, 36 out of 38 residents have been tested positive. Colin McGrath SDLP MLA, then we are going to speak to Pauline Shepherd, Chief Executive of the Independent Health and Care Providers. Colin, your reaction to this story today?

COLIN MCGRATH

Look if this was my family member I would want to know this information, it is very worrying that we cannot find out which homes have significant problems. Knowledge is power, if we know where the problems are then we would be able as family members to be able to try and do something, to try and prevent the further spread and I am sure that the families at this stage are very concerned and worried and are at their wits end especially if they were those two remaining people that don't have the virus at this stage in that home. And it is only a few short....

STEPHEN NOLAN

Remember there is another home, 29 out of 49 there is another home 36 out of 72 and sorry but I think it is important for me to say this, if you get Covid-19 you are not going to die necessarily, you are in a vulnerable group, if you are in a care home and you are elderly, so Gail Walker, the editor of the Belfast Telegraph listening to the Nolan Show this morning and saying the following: shocking statistics about the scale of infections in care homes, 36 out of 38 in one home and here is Gail's question, which is a good question, she says, now we need to find out how many of these elderly people have been taken to hospital? You see with the knowledge and with the power that knowledge brings now we should be asking that question that the Belfast Telegraph is following up on, how many

of the 36 people currently in a care home in NI tested positive with Covid have been taken to hospital? Why wouldn't we want to know that as well? Families would want to know.

COLIN MCGRATH

Absolutely and that is the basis of contact tracing once you know that somebody has the virus then you find out the people that they have interacted with so that you can try and control the spread of it and again that is why we have been pushing for testing to make sure that it is ramped up so we can find out exactly who it has. And it has taken quite a battle to get the testing and before that actually battling to get the proper PPE down into the care home sector because those care home sector staff were telling me weeks and weeks and weeks ago that they were feeling very vulnerable as staff and that they felt that their residents were vulnerable as well because they weren't getting the same levels of protection that was being offered out. So we have been pushing very hard but it just feels like we have been playing catch up rather than being proactive and I think having these figures, having this information available to family members as well would allow people to be proactive. And there is a care home in the media today, not too far away from where I live, that is reporting 17 deaths in the one home. This is an issue that needs to be addressed today and I will be asking at the Health Committee today which is on just shortly, I want to find out the role of the RQIA, because they have the statutory obligation to try and check out the standards and find out about the spread of viruses within homes. But they have been repurposing to essentially a telephone service. Now I am sure there could be slightly more done in that I have written to them, I have asked them, I am not satisfied with their answers and that....

STEPHEN NOLAN

What have they said, have they told you whether they have attended any site during Covid at all?

COLIN MCGRATH

It is a telephone service and it is more or less homes contacting them and them contacting homes about various ways to prevent the spread of viruses but I think it could be a lot more because I would worry if there were some homes that needed additional support prior to the virus, what support are they getting after the virus and as you say I wrote to them, I am not satisfied with their answers and that is why I will be asking today that they appear in front of the Health Committee to give a full rundown of that they should be and could be doing.

STEPHEN NOLAN

What type of message does it send out to the rest of the care workers in NI, the lowly paid incrediblegoing into our care homes, to our doctors and nurses that are doing it, to other people on the front line who are doing it if the RQIA are not visiting any care home anywhere in NI, why not?

COLIN MCGRATH

Absolutely and I appreciate and I understand that there is a virus and in a way to prevent the virus is to prevent the numbers of people coming in and out but absolutely every other job across all industries has had to try and change the way that it works and use technology and I think most have moved beyond just simply using a telephone and that is what I want to find out.

STEPHEN NOLAN

We are going to dip into the Health Committee after 10 today, so we will be interested to hear if anybody, if any elected representative asks the DoH officials why this information that they have had, that they have tabulated has not been given to the public and why it took the Nolan Show to do it?

COLIN MCGRATH

Absolutely and reasonable questions and I will certainly try my best to get asking them this morning as well.

SEAN

From the earliest days of the pandemic we have been told to isolate, to wash our hands, we have been told that this is very contagious, probably the most contagious virus that has come about. We have also been told that the elderly are at most risk, why have governments not looked after the elderly while they had everybody else locked down?

STEPHEN NOLAN

They have looked after the elderly, they are doing their best aren't they?

SEAN

They are doing their best, why are so many elderly dying then in homes needlessly? One of the things that we have been told over the past few weeks is that some elderly people were sent home from hospitals, possibly carrying the virus into nursing homes, why were they not kept in the Nightingale Wards, away from the other ones who were isolating? Why were we sending that virus into homes? We were sending it into homes, it is not that it just flew in through a window, it was sent in there.

STEPHEN NOLAN

There is a huge public reaction to this breaking story this morning, 36 residents out of 38 in a care home in NI tested positive for Covid, in another care home 29 positively tested for Covid out of 49, 36 positively tested out of 72. Let's get reaction from this from Pauline Shepherd, CE of the Independent Health and Care Providers Association. What are your thoughts?

PAULINE SHEPHERD

Really everything that I would have been saying has already been said. I totally agree with what the Commissioner Eddie Lynch has said. The issue around statistics, I think the statistics are coming out now on the basis the testing has been escalated in the last few weeks which is also what Dr Stout mentioned. So the more testing is done obviously the more figures you are going to have. I do totally agree with the need for the transparency. Trusts are helping in care homes but only in the last few weeks and that has been ramped up as Dr Stout mentioned around the introduction of that medical model. But there are still difficulties particularly managing with dementia residents, that is particularly difficult and challenging for staff to manage. However the key issue in this I think is yes you have all the figures in relation to the outbreak and infection. Some of those people will not be showing any symptoms and would not have even been on the radar as being possibly having Covid until those tests were done but the other key data in this that should be looked at is the recovery rates. It is very important that the public, particularly families in care homes should have that reassurance in that as well in terms of there are people recovering, there are people showing very few signs of Covid and they are making a recovery. Likewise yes it is a vulnerable group and unfortunately there are people that are dying but that is happening across the world and will continue

to happen. So yes it is shocking the statistics but it was inevitable that those statistics were going to come to the fore.

STEPHEN NOLAN

What chance have the people who haven't tested positive in these homes that we are identifying this morning, we are not actually identifying the names of the homes are we, we are pushing out the statistics that we have, what chance have the people who haven't tested positive got in remaining negative for it within the complicated setting of a nursing home?

PAULINE SHEPHERD

The issue has already been highlighted by Dr Stout in that yes it is a very infectious virus, you will never be able to protect someone totally that they cannot get this virus and that is just impossible because you cannot have someone in a care home who is not interacting in close contact with other people because you need to care for people, you need to look after them and you need to be close to them. Inevitably we are taking all precautions in terms of staff, but staff move in and out of care homes. We are taking precautions as a caller there mentioned about people transferring from hospitals to care homes, when that happens new people arriving in a care home are quarantined for 14 days, so all precautions are being taken but we will never be able to eliminate this completely, it is about mitigating the risks.

STEPHEN NOLAN

Figures from last week show that 40% of all Covid related deaths in NI are in care homes, but you are asking for the recovery rates to be published as well which is a really interesting question.

BILLY

I was just listening to a few comments and what have you, what is really getting me is you see regarding to the wee care home there at Glenabbey, my father was in there, we actually got him moved for health reasons to another home where fortunately enough at the minute there has been no outbreak in it but I just want to say, you see the managers and the carers of the home where my dad was and where he is now and every wee home in NI that has been affected by this it is terrible and I

lost a lot of friends, I got to know a lot of wee people in Glenabbey. What gets me is I haven't heard, this goes right to the top and this feels like a cover-up now that you have brought this out into the public domain what is going on....

STEPHEN NOLAN

We are not saying it is a cover up, we are not using the word cover up that would be inappropriate to use, but the point is the DoH haven't told you these figures, we have.

BILLY

What concerns me is you see people right at the top of the tree that own these homes there hasn't been one person.....

STEPHEN NOLAN

No, no I don't think we need to be pejorative about people who own the homes because I am sure they are doing their best, this is a bigger conversation about, well you tell me as someone who has a dad in a care home do you think you have a right to know about the spread of an outbreak in a care home that your loved one is in? Have you a right to know?

BILLY

Of course, it has to be out there but the point I am making is these millionaires at the top of the tree they have been profiteering for years.....

STEPHEN NOLAN

No, no they haven't been profiteering, actually I am going to stop you because actually many of the people who own care homes in NI, it hasn't been a very profitable business over a number of years in some of those homes. Ray Rafferty, Unison rep for the RVH.

RAY RAFFERTY

I think the worst thing about this is the figures that you gave out this morning, while they are appalling they are not shocking and they are not surprising. I think anyone who works within the health service environment not only knows that nursing homes potentially would be disastrously hit by this, the same as they would with flu most winters and other things. I think the difficulty here is the lack of planning, training, PPE etc that has been worked into the system for nursing homes. It was foreseeable but not enough was done. What you have to do is say a massive big thank you to the staff who within the nursing homes have been working at great personal cost and not only to their own health but also (unclear) their wages suffer drastically....

STEPHEN NOLAN

Do you know if families are being told the extent of the outbreak?

RAY RAFFERTY

No.

STEPHEN NOLAN

They are not being told?

RAY RAFFERTY

There is a limitation on the information that is being given out and I want to make this point very, very clearly, there is a need to maintain public confidence in the current system and that is why all the figures are not being produced and not being put into the public domain. It was modelled....

STEPHEN NOLAN

What do you mean by that?

RAY RAFFERTY

The government is very good at keeping figures, especially the DoH and modelling did occur at the very start of this in fact, even before Covid-19 as far as pandemic planning is concerned and they

know how to collate the figures, they have been doing it but the figures are not being released. I seen figures three weeks ago that showed there was 45 deaths within nursing homes within Belfast alone, that there was 30% infection rate across the residents of those homes. That was only in Belfast. There is a lot more up to date figures which I haven't seen. The question we have to pose is (1) why are the figures not being released? (2) Are these patients being (unclear) specifically in nursing homes to free up beds in these (unclear) n case there is a major pandemic that so that the general public can be seen and treated etc etc?

STEPHEN NOLAN

You have just said that you were told a couple of weeks ago that 45 people had died in care homes, why were those figures not released?

RAY RAFFERTY

Those figures are the property of both the Belfast Trust and the DoH and I am not in the position to release those but I was told, in fact I actually seen the paper work and those figures have never been produced public. But the interesting figure that.....

STEPHEN NOLAN

Hold on a minute what figures have never been produced publicly, hold on 45 people died in what period of time?

RAY RAFFERTY

That was up to early April.

STEPHEN NOLAN

And you are telling me those figures were tabulated but not released to the public?

RAY RAFFERTY

Yes. The figures are tabulated all the time and not released and it is the need for public confidence. The simple fact is the question that does need to be asked is how many people were transferred from nursing homes into hospital because of Covid-19? And how many weren't? And why were they not? Is it because there was a decision made either at department or governmental level that hospital beds needed to be kept free? That is the fundamental question that needs to be...and it is how do they look after our elderly?

STEPHEN NOLAN

You are asking a very provocative question there and we certainly as a programme have no evidence that anybody who needed hospital care were denied it but you are asking a provocative question around the data around that. George you are in a nursing home?

GEORGE

I am yes. None of us have been tested yet, staff or patients.

STEPHEN NOLAN

None of you have been tested?

GEORGE

No the virus isn't in here yet.

STEPHEN NOLAN

And how do you feel about not being tested?

GEORGE

For peace of mind.

STEPHEN NOLAN

Say that again you what?

GEORGE

I would love to be tested for peace of mind.

STEPHEN NOLAN

Well the Commissioner for Older People has been fighting, Eddie Lynch is his name and he has been fighting for all elderly people to be tested in care homes and up to now the DoH haven't done that. Why is it important for you to be tested?

GEORGE

For peace of mind, if I had it or if I didn't have it. I would love to know. Because it is in most, the most contagious virus ever, only the one in 1918, the Spanish Flu killed 33m people worldwide and this is going that way.

STEPHEN NOLAN

How old are you?

GEORGE

80, I was 80 on 14 March.

STEPHEN NOLAN

And can you tell me what you did for a living?

GEORGE

Yes I was a prison officer.

STEPHEN NOLAN

That's right you told me that before didn't you?

GEORGE

I am in here because I have no sickness but I can't walk, I have to use a wheelchair, but I am not sick in any way. It's just I can't walk. My legs gave up on me.

STEPHEN NOLAN

I want you to know that a lot of people care about you, you are clearly in a home where you feel comfortable and you feel safe....

GEORGE

Very much so they couldn't be better carers. The food is brilliant and I get whatever I want. The home is brilliant.

STEPHEN NOLAN

And remember George that there are many, many care homes in NI where there is not an outbreak, there are many care homes in NI where even if there is those people are being looked after and treated. But you are saying you would like to be tested so that you have peace of mind?

GEORGE

Yes definitely.

STEPHEN NOLAN

I am glad we have been able to hear from you this morning.

GEORGE

I tell you how contagious it is, it has killed more people in America in four and a half months than the Vietnam War done in 20 years.

STEPHEN NOLAN

And that is why we are all doing our best to protect each other as a community and you are a valuable member of our community, you are a valuable listener to the BBC, so keep the radio on for me and continue to play your part on Radio Ulster because we know you are listening.

GEORGE

I never have it off.

STEPHEN NOLAN

We will be back talking to you in the future again. The MLA Jim Wells listening to all of this, you have more information you want to put in the public domain about care homes.

JIM WELLS

I am aware of eight homes in NI where ten or more people have died, three of those are in the public domain including the one that was revealed by Lisa Smith in the Belfast Telegraph this morning, where she has published the fact that Ringdufferin Nursing Home in Downpatrick 17 people have died. Now I have been aware of that situation at Ringdufferin for quite a while and the home and the statistics were given by the home to the department but not released. I am calling upon Sean Holland and the Minister to come before the Health Committee this morning at Stormont and give the public of NI a complete up to date situation with care homes. They would collect the statistics from the care homes at 10.30am every morning so they have the right up to date information as of yesterday. The people need to know how many people in care homes are affected by coronavirus, how many people have been referred to intensive care and how many have died. And the question that your programme needs to ask and Lisa Smith has asked is why have those stats been withheld from last Tuesday when they have them on their table now and I am telling you that I believe the reason is that those stats are so bad that the department is extremely reluctant to release them.

STEPHEN NOLAN

You are a member of the legislative Assembly, so you are entitled to say it, but that is a shocking thing for you to say and I would need to challenge you on that. You are making a suggestion if not an accusation that figures are so bad the DoH are withholding them. You have no evidence for that.

JIM WELLS

What I have evidence for is that if you read Lisa Smith's excellent article in the Belfast Telegraph this morning she has made numerous contacts with RQI, the department and the press office asking for this information and has been refused point blank....

STEPHEN NOLAN

Asking for what information?

JIM WELLS

The information on how many people have been infected, how many people have been referred to intensive care and how many people have sadly died. That information has not been released for nine days....

STEPHEN NOLAN

We do know the NISRA figures, I will read it, of the 393 total deaths involving Covid occurring up to the 24 April 209 occurred in hospitals, 158 occurred in care homes, three occurred in hospices, 23 occurred at residential addresses of another location. The proportion of all Covid-19 deaths occurring in care homes has increased from 33.3% by April 17 to 40.2% in the year to date of 24 April.

JIM WELLS

That is correct but note the date, 24 April, why when the department have all the information from the 24 April to 6 May have they not released that to the media, why could that have been released to the Health Committee and why are the RQIA and the Board not coming clean and telling the public what is going on? I have huge respect for Robin Swann and Sean Holland, he is the director of Social Care and they are doing an excellent job but could I tell you from my experience and I have sat in

Robin Swann's seat, that the last thing you need to do is withhold information from the public because that causes more concern than actually coming clean and you and I remember the whole swine flu issue where the then Minister Michael McGimpsey would not release information on the number of deaths as a result of the swine flu, when he did so 13 people had died and that caused far more concern than being open and honest. What I am saying to the Minister this morning and to Sean is go to the Committee and be utterly open and honest with what is going on because I am aware of figures that haven't been published....

STEPHEN NOLAN

Are you saying you are aware of ten care homes where more than ten people or more have died, what are you saying?

JIM WELLS

Care homes where more than ten people have died what happened when I became aware of the Ringdufferin situation.....

STEPHEN NOLAN

Of Covid?

JIM WELLS

Of Covid-19 yes, when I became aware of the Ringdufferin situation I contacted public representatives that I knew worked close to the ground on this and they have come back to me with figures which are quite shocking. One of them was Glenabbey, now Glenabbey have not gone public and stated that (unclear) have passed away, when I was talking about it it was 12 it is now 17 and this has gone public. Other (unclear) have occurred since 24 April and....

STEPHEN NOLAN

Whether the department publishes the information or not the department might know the information, so why don't we ask the department this morning, do they know the information and if they know it why won't they share it and we will go to NISRA and we will ask NISRA do they know the information

and if they do why won't they share it and a lag in information could be down to the time it takes to register the deaths, there has been a ramping up of testing so we would expect more data....

JIM WELLS

That's not true.

STEPHEN NOLAN

What is not true?

JIM WELLS

That is not true because each nursing home in NI at 10.30am is required to email the department, not NISRA, the department with the up to date statistics of the numbers infected, the numbers referred to intensive care and the numbers who passed away directly as a result of Covid-19. So that information is live and was indeed being given by the department up until 24 April and then it stopped and that is the question that Lisa Smith, I would advise everyone to read Lisa Smith's article in the Telegraph this morning, where she has single handedly been trying to find that information and has been refused and has been told she is not going to get it.

STEPHEN NOLAN

Dr Connor Bamford is a virologist at QUB and I have been sharing this story with Conor this morning that we are reporting there is a nursing home in NI where 36 out of 38 people have tested positive, another 29 out of a total population of 49 and another 36 out of a total population of 72 and I asked Conor Bamford, virologist at QUB, for his reaction to this news.

DR CONNOR BAMFORD

It is incredibly worrying, however it is not incredibly surprising we know that this virus is quite hard to stop coming into a care home and we know it is very hard to stop spreading it so when it comes down about these figures I am not surprised, I think something should have been done about them.

STEPHEN NOLAN

Why is it incredibly worrying in your view?

DR CONNOR BAMFORD

It is incredibly worrying because we know that this virus is very dangerous particularly people who are older or who maybe have long-term health issues, who might be in care homes, these are the most vulnerable people and we should have protected them and we need to protect them more because they are the people who are going to end up in hospital the most and they will end up putting the burden on the NHS and of course they are people's family members so we really should have protected them from the very start.

STEPHEN NOLAN

And these are the figures with the DoH have and have not put in the public domain, it is a radio show having to do it.

DR CONNOR BAMFORD

Again that is also incredibly worrying, part of this is someone has to keep track of these figures and then on the other hand someone has to tell everyone about these figures because the transparency and public confidence in the public health response is really paramount in a pandemic situation like this where everyone has to buy into the collective good.

STEPHEN NOLAN

A very senior medical practitioner said to me when talking about the nursing home in NI where 36 out of the 38 residents have it, he commented it is only a matter of time until the other two get it, what is your view?

DR CONNOR BAMFORD

Personally I am quite surprised if they haven't got it already. We know this is very difficult to stop for one of the reasons it could be spread because people aren't actually showing symptoms, so if you are not testing everybody all the time you are not going to pick it up. So yes I would be more

concerned about those people, I am also concerned about what is going to happen in the next couple of weeks those people in that care home who currently have the virus, they might die, a sizeable proportion of those people might actually end up dead.

STEPHEN NOLAN

Why do you say that?

DR CONNOR BAMFORD

Because we know that this virus is particularly deadly in people who are older aged and who will get a severe infection, so I predict that an unfortunately large proportion of those people will end up dead.

STEPHEN NOLAN

We don't know whether the families have been told, they might have been told basic information like there is an outbreak of Covid in the home your mum or dad is in but we don't know, of course we don't know because the DoH haven't even released any of this information around the figures so we don't know if a family has been told your mum or dad doesn't have it but there are 36 they are one of the two and they are surrounded by 36 other people who do have it.

DR CONNOR BAMFORD

That is also another concerning fact, people have to be told about this, especially the people who are related to those individuals. I think we need to be thinking about how we can control this in this particular care home but also in others, this might be one care home but of course there are many other ones out there.

STEPHEN NOLAN

I have actually been told that this care home is renowned for being a really professional good care home, how will this virus spread in a care home? What are the risks and dangers in a care home?

DR CONNOR BAMFORD

I wouldn't put the blame on any care home, no matter how good the care home it just is incredibly difficult because the virus is relatively transmittable when you aren't showing symptoms, so then if you aren't really testing people who aren't sick you are not going to pick this up. At the minute in the UK we are not testing people who are sick so I am not surprised about this and again you would have to ensure proper PPE. I know there has also been concerns in the care sector that there is proper PPE combined with testing was really not given so I am not surprised about that and again it can just be spread through people's, ultimately on people's breath essentially you wouldn't really know you were sick and you were spreading until it was too late and once it has gone into a care home then I guess it is very easy for it to spread throughout that.

STEPHEN NOLAN

There is another school of thought and that is the reason why the DoH is sitting on these figures and hasn't put them in the public domain is they don't want to scare the public, they don't want to scare families, they don't want to scare residents.

DR CONNOR BAMFORD

That is right this is a very scary situation, but again I think in public conscience with the whole response I think these figures should have been released right from the very start and then we should have been using that information to help protect future care homes. This isn't going to go away any time soon, this is going to be a long problem and we need to think about all those people in the future we can protect.

STEPHEN NOLAN

We know they have got these figures and it is a statement of fact that they didn't publish them, why do you think they haven't published them?

DR CONNOR BAMFORD

Again (1) might have been because they don't want to scare people, (2) I guess.....(break in transmission)

STEPHEN NOLAN

I guess just finally the final thing is of the data we have, so we know that there are two people in one home who have not yet tested positive, 36 of the other residents out of a total of 38 have, another home it is 29 out of 49, so there are 20 people not tested positive, 36 out of 72 in another home, there are 36 not tested positive, so that provides an opportunity to protect those people not just who have got it because they need protection and care and I am sure that are getting it but to try to stop those other people in that home where there is definite Covid from getting it in the first place, what could those homes do ultimately to stop people getting it?

DR CONNOR BAMFORD

I think that should be the first priority, stop the other people getting it and then treat those people who have it and then also think about the other care homes who don't really have it at the minute. There are things that care homes are doing and can do and that is maybe you could separate staff so staff dedicated to Covid people, people with Covid and staff dedicated to people who don't have it, essentially splitting the care home in two and enforcing vigorous isolation so that people who have Covid don't mix with people who don't have Covid and then again rigorous PPE provision and testing, you have to test everybody all the time for this because it is very, very difficult to stop the virus spreading and we know that it can spread even when you aren't very sick so I think just adequate testing.

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