Tuesday, 1 July 2025 1 2 (10.01 am) 3 LADY HALLETT: Ms Carey. 4 MS CAREY: Thank you, my Lady. 5 My Lady, the first witnesses to be called this 6 morning are impact witnesses from each of the four 7 Bereaved groups. Inevitably, they will be discussing 8 distressing themes, including end-of-life care, and 9 death, and indeed, the fourth witness this morning will 10 also cover matters including death by suicide. 11 Can I remind, therefore, everyone in the hearing 12 room and those watching online that there is support 13 available here at Dorland House and on the Inquiry 14 website and if anyone wishes to leave the hearing room 15 they should feel free to do so. 16 May I hand over now to Ms Cecil, King's Counsel. 17 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much. 18 Ms Cecil. 19 MS CECIL: Indeed, good morning, my Lady. May I please call 20 Jane Wier-Wierzbowska. MS JANE WIER-WIERZBOWSKA (affirmed) 21 22 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much for coming to help us 23 today, we do appreciate it, and I do understand how 24 difficult it may be. So I'm sure as Ms Cecil has 25 already said, if you need a break at any stage, just

1 Firstly, if you may, could you just tell us in 2 a couple of words what type of woman your mum was. 3 A. Yes, my mum was an incredibly strong and resilient lady, 4 really, throughout her life. She was friendly, she was 5 fun loving, she had a wonderful sense of humour and 6 family meant absolutely everything to her. But she was 7 also, it sounds contradictory, but she was also quite 8 a private person, as well. So in a number of ways that 9 makes it quite difficult for me to share what happened 10 to us today, but I know she'd want me to do it, as our 11 story impacts on so many others as well.

And I want to do it, because I want us to not forget what really matters. The love and care of our families, which no politician or care home manager should be allowed to deny us.

- Q. Certainly in your statement, and just for those that are following, it's INQ000614372. You paint a very vivid picture of your mum, her life.
- 19 **A.** Yes.

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- 20 Q. Her interests.
- 21 **A.** Yes.
- 22 Q. She was a very active woman?
- 23 A. Incredibly active, yes.
- 24 Q. And worked in the NHS as a clerk in the children's ward
 25 for many years. And was the centre, ultimately, of your
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1 say. Although again, I think she may have told you,

2 most people, I find, it's easier to get it over with,

3 but it's up to you. All right?

4 THE WITNESS: Thank you, my Lady.

Questions from COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY

6 MS CECIL: Thank you.

7 Ms Wier-Wierzbowska, you're here today to share with 8 the Inquiry your experiences during the pandemic in

9 terms of your story, your family's story and your

10 mother's story; is that right?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. So with that, I'd like to begin by asking you a little

13 bit about your mum, Patricia Smalley.

14 **A.** Yes.

15 Q. Plainly much loved.

16 A. (Witness nodded)

17 Q. Sadly died during the second wave of the pandemic --

18 A. Yes.

19 **Q.** -- on 27 January 2021.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. And she was 91; is that right?

22 A. She was. Just 91, yes, in that month.

23 Q. About a month after her 91st birthday?

24 A. Almost, yes. Well, days, yes.

25 Q. A few days, my apologies.

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1 family life, both for you, your younger brother --

2 **A.** Yes.

3 Q. -- and of course your dad?

4 A. Yes, of course. Yes, yes.

5 Q. So what I'm going to do now, if I may, is turn really to

6 the circumstances leading up to your mum, certainly

7 firstly entering into the care home. Prior to that,

8 she'd lived a little bit further away but moved closer

9 to you following your father's death; is that right?

10 A. Absolutely, yes, yes.

11 Q. Initially into supported, sheltered accommodation?

12 A. Yes, that's right, and she settled really well there and

embraced the community life that was happening in there.

14 So she did very well, as we expected her to.

15 Q. And she was still fairly independent at that point --

16 A. (Witness nodded)

17 Q. -- and you enjoyed many trips, as I understand it?

18 **A.** We did. We did really actually right up until her

19 stroke, yes.

20 Q. Indeed, and as -- if I can just deal that. Just prior

21 to that, I understand that she was diagnosed with

22 Alzheimer's; is that right?

23 A. That's absolutely right. Sadly, not too long after she

24 moved down, she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and

25 obviously that was a huge blow to all of us. As we

- know, dementia is an untreatable progressive andterminal disease, but I knew then that what would help
- 3 her would be lots of stimulation, lots of company, and
- 4 that's what I set out to give her, really.
- 5 $\,$ Q. -- (overspeaking) -- and you describe that don't you in
- 6 your -- you give a very vivid description, again, in
- 7 your statement of taking her on different trips
- 8 and National Trust, and so on and so forth?
- 9 A. Absolutely.
- 10 Q. And really engaging with her interests?
- 11 A. Absolutely, yes. She loved gardens, she loved nature,
- she loved animals, so that was the focus pretty much of
- our trips. And as time went on, when she first was
- diagnosed, I was working full time, but in 2014, I went
 - down to two days a week so that I could spend more time
- with her, and in 2017 I retired altogether, and that
- meant we could go out and do things together every day,
- and I'm so, so glad that I did that now.
- 19 $\,$ **Q.** Thank you. So at the time when she was in sheltered
- accommodation, as you've already explained, she then
- 21 subsequently suffered quite a severe stroke; is that
- 22 right?

- 23 A. She did. She did unfortunately. It was extremely
- severe and the prognosis actually wasn't terribly good.
- 25 She lost all mobility down her left-hand side and so
 - 5
- 1 floor which overlooked a huge courtyard area. She was
- 2 right in the corner of it, but nonetheless it was a nice
- 3 view, and I took in pots of plants so she could see
- 4 those, and we had a bird table put outside so she could
- 5 still enjoy nature. After probably a couple of weeks
- 6 they were able to get her into a chair, so she was able
- 7 to be moved around. It was a huge, heavy armchair-like
- 8 structure and it was very difficult to move but you
- 9 could move her around, so she could go to social events
- in the lounge or we could take her to one of the other
- 11 rooms to sit and have a different kind of social time
- 12 with her.

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- So it was positive, and I was able to be with her.
- You know, I was very worried about her, obviously, after her stroke. She was obviously already losing her memory
- and she had lost her mobility. She had been so active
- 17 throughout her life, as you mentioned earlier.
- 18 But she did start to make some progress.
- 19 $\,$ **Q.** And in terms of just picking up on one of the things you
- 20 just mentioned there, how often did you visit your mum?
- 21 A. Every day.
- 22 **Q.** In December and January 2019 [sic].
- 23 $\,$ **A.** Every single day. I used to go in in the morning, gave
- them a bit of time to, sort of, get her up and get her
- 25 ready, and I'd go in about 10.00 in the morning, and she

- 1 there was absolutely no option but for her to go into
- 2 care. And she moved into the care home on 23 December
- 3 2019, so just a few weeks, really, before lockdown.
- 4 $\,$ **Q.** Exactly that. And in terms of a home, you found a home
- 5 that you were happy with, that she was happy with?
- 6 A. Yes.
- 7 Q. Is that right?
- 8 A. Absolutely. And I remember distinctly, it was very --
- 9 it was fortunately closest to where we lived as well,
- and, you know, so there would be no issues with any kind
- of transport problems. I knew that I could get there on
- 12 foot if I needed to. And I remember distinctly saying
- to her "There is absolutely nothing that can stop me
- 15 to her There is absolutely nothing that can stop in
- being here with you", and how wrong I was.
- 15 $\,$ **Q**. And the reason for that was because she required
- 16 full-time specialist care that was simply not able to be
- provided in the community or at home with you?
- 18 **A.** Absolutely, yes, she was basically immobile, really,
- 19 yeah.
- 20 Q. So if I can begin, then, in December of 2019, when she
- 21 moved in, in terms of her living conditions, how would
- 22 you describe those?
- 23 A. Within the home?
- 24 Q. Within the care home?
- 25 A. Yeah. Well, she had a lovely room there on the ground
- 1 used to get tired so she was ready, really, to go to
- 2 sleep in the evening, so I left about 8.00 in the
- 3 evening, so I was there all day really, with her.
- 4 Q. In terms of what you did when you were there, obviously
- 5 you were company?
- 6 A. Yes.

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- 7 Q. You obviously spoke about many different things?
- 8 A. Mm-hm
- 9 Q. What other activities did you undertake with your mum?
- 10 A. Really, in terms of her wellbeing, I helped to manageher food. If she wasn't eating well, you know, I would
- make sure I'd take in things that might tempt her,
- that I knew that she liked, she had quite a sweet tooth,
 - and I'd do that.

Not too long after being in there, she was diagnosed with dysphagia, and so she had to have thickener in her tea, and her fluid levels were low so I would regularly go and make her tea and put the thickener into the tea and help her drink it, as well. You know, she was

adjusting, as well, to life with just one active hand
 and not being easily mobile, so it was guite important

22 that I did that and kept her fluid levels up.

We also had a private physiotherapist come in and assess her, and although she felt that there was no way

she was going to probably be able to move her arm again,

0 0 .

- she did give me some hope about her leg and recommended 1 2 exercises that we do every day.
- 3 Q. And did you do those with her?
- A. Yes, I did. I did. 4
- 5 Q. And in terms of her mental and cognitive state at that
- 6 point, how would you have described that? So just
- 7 immediately prior to the pandemic and lockdown?
- 8 Obviously by that point she'd had Alzheimer's for Α.
- 9 seven years --
- 10 Q. Of course.
- A. -- so she did get a bit confused at times, but generally 11
- speaking she was aware of what was going on around her, 12
- 13 had opinions about things, and she knew who I was and
- 14 who the rest of the family were. So that was all very
- 15 encouraging.
- 16 **Q.** So the pandemic then struck.
- 17 A. Mm.
- 18 Q. And you explain in your statement that you were told on
- 19 17 March that the home was going to be effectively
- 20 locked down as well; is that right?
- 21 A. That's absolutely right, yes. The impact was
- 22 catastrophic on me because, as I've just explained,
- 23 I was so involved in my mum's care within the care home.
- 24 And as Counsel to the Inquiry said yesterday, you know,
- 25 a care home is not a hospital, it's a person's home.
- 1 a moment.
- 2 And certainly within your statement, at
- 3 paragraph 11, what you explain is that you had to try to
- 4 say goodbye to your mum that day --
- 5 A. Yeah.
- 6 Q. -- not knowing when you would have any physical contact
- 7 or see her again, effectively, in that sense?
- 8 A. Absolutely. And the physical contact turned out to be
- 9 never. I never had that again with her. And that was
- ten months prior to her death. So it seemed 10
- 11 extraordinarily cruel and inhumane to be kept apart for
- 12 that length of time. And increasingly, Mum did not
- 13 understand, and reacted in different ways to that, which
- 14 were equally upsetting to me.
- 15 Q. I'm just going to move then to the visits you were able
- 16 to have and the initial visits that took place. As
- 17 I understand it, those were window visits: is that
- 18 right?
- A. Yes. 19
- 20 Q. How would you -- just describe that for us, please.
- A. Okay. Well, Mum was taken into one of the lounges at 21
- 22 the front of the building, so there were other residents
- 23 there. They'd move her to the window, and I would stand
- 24 at the window -- the first time I did it, I tried to
- 25 speak but of course she couldn't hear me through the 11

- 1 But in that moment, that was taken away from us. It was
- 2 no longer my mum's home because it was going to be alien
- 3 to her without me there and without other visitors too,
- 4 but predominantly -- as I've said, I was every day --
- 5 Was that an immediate lockdown from that point forwards?
- 6 It was immediate. I got very upset. He came into the 7
 - room and I was with Mum. I don't think she was quite as
- 8 aware of what was going on because it was in the
- 9 evening, and I remember crying, and not coping with it
- 10 at all, and he was trying to say, "You need to stop
- 11 because of your mum."
- 12 It was obviously a very, very difficult situation for Q.
- 13 you both?
- 14 A. It was extremely difficult, yes.
- 15 Q. Were you able, or was one of the care staff able, to
- 16 explain to your mum what was going to happen, in terms
- 17 of the home being closed and you no longer being able to
- 18 visit?
- 19 A. I really hope so but I don't know. I mean, I tried to
- 20 explain to her then, and I tried to explain to her every
- 21 time I had some sort of visit, if you can call it that,
- 22 the phone calls and Skype calls, and --
- 23 Q. We're going to move to those visits.
- 24 -- (overspeaking) --
- 25 Please don't worry, we will go through those in just

- 1 window. So the next time I printed off messages for her
- 2 which I held up. I mean, how that must have appeared to
- 3 someone with dementia, I don't know; that her daughter
- 4 was standing outside of the building where she was, when
- 5 she'd been in there with her every single day, and
- 6 holding up things to read. But she didn't seem agitated
- 7 or distressed by it, but after eight days, I was told
- 8 that I could no longer do that.
- Q. And at that point had you been attending every day --9
- 10 A. Yes.
- 11 Q. -- with your placards?
- 12 A. Yes
- 13 Your pieces of paper?
- 14 A. Yes, yes, every single day.
- LADY HALLETT: Did they give a reason? 15
- THE WITNESS: Pardon? 16
- 17 LADY HALLETT: Sorry to interrupt.
- 18 Did they give a reason?
- A. They did give a reason. The most significant reason was 19
- 20 that they had to think of all their residents' welfare
- 21 which, you know, I can appreciate, but can't see how
- 22 I was impacting on that. And they had to ring-fence the
- 23 space, the garden, for residents who wanted to go
- 24 outside. But the grounds were huge and there were lots
- 25 of areas that could have been ring-fenced or identified

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1 for residents who wanted to. So I can't see how that 2 was a problem.

3 MS CECIL: Thank you.

> And you've just alluded to the fact that they were stopped, they were stopped around 27 March; is that right?

A. Yes. 7

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8 Q. And why were they stopped at that point? Do you know?

9 A. I think government guidance, probably, said that should 10 stop too. I don't really know, that seemed to be so random and change so frequently. Although that was just 11 12 the beginning, obviously.

13 Q. And did you raise your concerns about the lack of visits 14 with the home?

15 A. I absolutely did, but at that point, you know, they were 16 adamant that this space should be reserved for residents 17 and that, you know, government guidelines were saying 18 that there shouldn't be any visits. They said some 19 residents became distressed, and I said that my mum 20 wasn't distressed by it at all, and that perhaps they 21 should review the situation on a case-by-case basis, but 22 they were adamant that I wasn't going to be able to see 23 her in that way anymore.

24 Do you know if they ever did review that situation on Q. 25 a case-by-case basis, or were there blanket restrictions

1 If I couldn't see her or have contact, I didn't know 2 really how she was. And of course with the dementia, 3 I didn't want her to forget who I was --

4 Q. Of course.

5 A. -- either. And I'm very grateful that she never did.

6 Q. So those phone calls then became your daily contact with 7 your mum, is that right, initially after that?

Yes, yes. 8 Α.

9 Q. And then that progressed into the video calls --

10 A. Yes.

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Q. -- that you've just described. 11

12 A. Yes, mm.

13 Q. And in terms of those video calls, how frequent were 14 those?

A. They were variable. So not necessarily regular, but I'd 15

call every day to see if I could have a slot, and 17 generally they were very helpful in letting me do that

18 if they could. But the nature of the calls was quite

19 difficult at times. Obviously the technology was not

something Mum was familiar with anyway, she couldn't use 20

21 it because of her mobility issues and because she didn't

22 understand it, so there was never any privacy on the

23 call.

24 Q. Did you always have a member of staff then present to 25 assist your mum?

1 or conditions put in place on each occasion?

2 A. As far as I know, they didn't review it, but they just 3 kept the blanket ban there.

4 Q. You explain in your statement that you felt you were 5 treading on eggshells. What did you mean by that?

6 A. I felt I had to be very, very cautious. I, you know, my 7 mission became I must see my mum and keep contact with

8 my mum in every single way I can, and from the time that

9 I started doing these window visits, I was also having

10 a 7 o'clock phone call in the evening. I wanted to

11 speak to her every day before she went to sleep in the

12 evening, and they let me do that. And I -- and Skype

13 calls began, and I would have those as often as I could.

And I just felt that if I was too pushy, they might not 15 let me have these calls every evening, or some of the

16 Skype calls that I had. And I was terrified that if

17 I pushed too hard, all of my contact with my mum or

18 a lot of my contact with my mum would be cut off.

> So it was a balancing act, I feel, to keep ... you know, I was persistent, always polite, I hope, but I was determined that I wanted to keep contact with Mum. I wanted to be able to manage her healthcare, I'd been doing that for years. You know, I had shared power of attorney for her health as well and suddenly all that had disappeared.

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1 Yes, yes. Always.

2 Q. Were these taking place on iPads or something like that?

3 A. They were.

4 Q. They were?

5 A. Yes, yes. So they'd take the iPad to her. And it was 6 variable. I mean, every day or every call, I'd explain 7 why I couldn't be there.

8 Q. Do you think your mum understood that?

9 A. Not really, no.

10 Q. Not really?

A. No. I think it's hard because the world inside the care 11 12 home was seemingly going on as normal. Nothing there,

13 apart from my absence, had changed, and it haunts me

14 always that she feels that I was choosing not to be

15 there for some reason.

16 Q. I do understand that. And in terms of those video 17 calls, there was then a point where you were able to 18 visit again, to actually physically go to the care home?

19 Α.

20 Q. That was in around June until September; is that right?

21 Α.

22 Q. And either in the open lounge door or in the garden?

23 A. Yes, yeah.

24 And were those visits also socially distanced?

25 Absolutely they were, yes. Yes. They -- Mum was often, A.

- 1 because her chair was quite difficult to move, usually
- 2 in the lounge area, with the patio doors open, and
- 3 there'd be a trestle table keeping distance between us.
- 4 And that was difficult. Mum often felt the cold, and
- 5 she would be, you know, distressed by that, and so some
- 6 of that precious half hour would be felt -- would be
- 7 spent seeing if I could find someone to go and get
- 8 a blanket or a cardigan or something to keep her warm.
- 9 Q. To make her more comfortable?
- 10 A. To make her more comfortable, yes, so she could kind of
- 11 focus on the visit.
- 12 Q. And then I understand that those were paused for a short
- 13 period because there was an outbreak of Covid in the
- 14 home. Before then, um, visits resuming but in
- 15 a slightly different format again?
- 16 A. Yes.
- 17 Q. And they'd evolved to what they called "pod visits".
- 18 And I understand that the care home had built two -- had
- 19 effectively kitted out two purpose-built spaces?
- 20 A.
- Q. One was a former library. 21
- 22 Α.
- 23 **Q.** One was a former bedroom. But spaces with a perspex
- 24 screen dividing the room.
- 25 Α. Mm.

- 1 want to be put pushy because they -- you know, I phoned
- 2 every morning to see if there were pods or garden slots,
- 3 and generally they were very good, and if there were
- 4 slots, because it was a large care home, they let me in.
- 5 And I thought: if I start pushing too much they're going
- 6 to stop that. So, again, I held back.
- 7 Q. And throughout this period, how was your mother's
- 8 health, wellbeing?
- 9 A. Deteriorating. Without a doubt. Yes. Yeah.
- 10 Q. And certainly in terms of the visiting guidance and the
- 11 different restrictions that were put in place, you
- 12 explain within your statement that there was a lot of
- 13 confusion and there were often competing guidance --
- 14 aspects of guidance either from national government or
- 15 the local authority or, indeed, other organisations or
- 16 the care home; is that right?
- 17 A. That's absolutely right, and again, it just added to my
- 18 stress and trauma of the situation, you know, one time
- 19 in particular I remember that we were in tier 1 as an
- 20 area, which said that visits could be allowed but our
- 21 local public health deemed, apparently, they told me at
- 22 the care home, that visits weren't safe to continue, and
- 23 so they followed the local advice and stopped the
- 24
- 25 Q. And if can just then just pick up again on something

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- 1 Q. So, again, that distance is there, with some level of 2 physical protection --
- 3 A. Yes.
- 4 Q. -- was, I think -- was, I assume, the aim.
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- 6 Q. And also a sound system to assist with communication for 7 the obvious needs of the residents within the home.
- 8 A.
- 9 Q. And how did you find those visits?
- 10 A. Difficult, again, for different reasons. The problem 11 with booking a half hour slot anyway is that, you know,
- 12 you don't know what time of day it's going to be and how
- 13 Mum is going to be. She'd sometimes be very sleepy, so
- 14 contact would be limited.

15 When she wasn't, she would almost certainly beckon 16 me in and say, "Just come on through", and I'd have to 17 again explain that I couldn't do that. It was very 18 hard. I mean, obviously I was pleased to be able to see 19 her in some way possible but it just really wasn't 20 acceptable. I wasn't able to give her the quality and 21 amount of care that I'd been used and wanted to, and it 22 was always very distressing leaving her, and her going

- 23 back to her room. I don't know how much -- you know,
- 24 there was no regulation. I have no idea. I asked
- 25 questions, sometimes, but again, it was that I don't

that you mentioned briefly earlier in relation to

- 2 obviously you weren't able to know exactly what was
- 3 going on or taking place in the care home --
- 4 A. No.

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- 5 Q. -- in terms of visibility because you weren't there, but
- 6 you had one concern about whether or not she was being
- 7 taken to the communal areas and obtaining stimulation in
- 8 that respect. How did that concern come about?
- 9 A. It came about via one Skype call in particular, and it
- 10 was a Saturday afternoon, and she was in bed, which
- 11 concerned me. You know, I didn't know if there was
- 12
- a problem with her health. It turns out that there
- 13 wasn't but they just hadn't got her up that day. They 14
- were, I guess, staffing, we know, was often a problem,
- 15 and I think they were just taking it in turns a bit with
- 16 residents that they got ready, and got up.

But it really worried me that for someone in her position who relied totally on others, she was losing her memory, she'd lost her mobility, she'd lost her family, it seemed to her, and she was, you know, she was in her bed on a Saturday afternoon, mid to late afternoon. And I thought, I've no idea how often this might happen. And I didn't even know if, on the days that she'd been got up, whether she'd been taken from

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her room in her chair to the lounge or not. So I just

1 don't know.

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And again, they weren't questions that I could often ask. It depended sometimes who was with her, and when I felt I could, I'd say, "Is Mum going to the lounge later?" Or "Has she been to the lounge?" But again, it was a bit of a lottery as to what I could say or do.

- Q. And you touch upon the impact of isolation upon thosewith dementia and Alzheimer's within your statement.
- 9 A. (Witness nodded).
- 10 Q. And certainly, in due course, that's what -- we will be
 11 hearing from Professor Banerjee, an expert in those
- 12 matters and, of course, also the Every Story Matters
- 13 record --
- 14 A. Yes.
- 15 Q. -- which effectively records the same sentiments.
- 16 A. Mm.

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- 17 Q. I just want to move on, if I may, to immediately prior
 18 to your mother contracting Covid within the home, but
 19 just before I do that, just touching on an occasion when
 20 your mum needed external medical care. How was that
 21 organised, did you have any difficulties accessing that
- A. Not really. I think the situation that you're referring
 to there, I spoke, as I did when I phoned in the
- evenings, it would go through to a member of staff and
- 1 **Q.** You did.

medical care?

- A. An open area. And I was told that I could go and see
 her through her bedroom window, through her patio doors.
 And so I obviously leapt on that, and I took a garden
 chair with me, and a -- this was January 2021 -- and
 a hot drink, and layers of clothing, and my mobile
- phone. And I went and sat outside her patio door for as
- 8 long as I could until someone said, "You should leave
- 9 now" or it was dark and she wouldn't have been able to 10 see me anyway. But bizarrely. I had to be on my own.
- see me anyway. But bizarrely, I had to be on my own.
 I couldn't take my husband or a friend with me. It was
 - just me, despite I could see no reason, no logical reason, why that would pose a threat, to anyone.
 - But anyway, I was able to do that. I had my phone, they put a mobile phone in a black bin-bag on my mum's shoulder, and I was able to talk to her. I did have conversations then, but obviously she became more ill, and in the last 48 hours of her life I was allowed end-of-life visits. I'm not sure why end of life had to mean those last hours, why it couldn't have been before. It makes no sense to me who determines what is end of life, and why can't there be more dignity than having to speak to Mum through a plastic bag?
- speak to Mum through a plastic bag?
 By the time I was allowed in, probably the first
 4 hours, she was conscious, she was aware who I was,

- 1 I was told that Mum's oxygen levels were very low and
- 2 obviously I was hugely concerned about that and I knew
- 3 from an incident before lockdown where we'd had the
- 4 Rapid Response Team out that they could do that, and so
- 5 I requested that they bring in the Rapid Response Team,
- 6 and they did, and they put her on oxygen.
- Q. Now I just want to turn to, as I say, later in Januaryof 2021, when your mum contracted Covid.
- 9 **A.** Mm.
- 10 **Q**. And you explain that she had no real symptoms of Covid,
- 11 and appeared asymptomatic; is that right?
- 12 A. She did. I mean, she was by this stage on the oxygen,
- 13 but she didn't appear to be struggling with her
- 14 breathing, there was no coughing, nothing that suggested
- 15 to me that she had Covid. It did seem asymptomatic,
- 16 yes.
- 17 $\,$ **Q**. And were you able to see your mum initially following
- 18 that diagnosis?
- 19 **A.** No
- 20 Q. No. And there came a point where you were aware that
- she was approaching her end of life, and at that stage,
- 22 were arrangements made for you to visit?
- 23 A. There were arrangements about, probably five, six or so
- days before her death. Her room, I think I said, was in
- 25 the corner of a courtyard.

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- 1 but she wasn't communicating with me. She was
- 2 non-verbal. And then when I went in the next day she
- 3 was unconscious. So I -- (overspeaking) --
- 4 Q. I'm just going to ask you a couple of questions, if
 - I may, about those visits. You've explained you were
- 6 only allowed to go on your own.
- 7 A. Yes.

- 8 Q. Is that right?
- 9 **A**. Yes
- 10 **Q.** Your husband would often wait in the car outside for
- 11 you.
- 12 **A**. Yes
- 13 Q. And in terms of those visits, you would also have to
- 14 wear PPE equipment; is that right?
- 15 A. Yes, yes
- 16 Q. And that would involve a face mask?
- 17 **A.** Yes.
- 18 **Q.** An apron?
- 19 **A.** Yes.
- 20 Q. And gloves?
- 21 A. Yes
- 22 Q. And in terms of her room, you also explain in your
- 23 statement that the -- the layout of how it looked
- 24 changed?
- 25 A. It did.

- 1 Q. And became more clinical?
- 2 A. It did, yes.
- Q. And how did you feel about that? How do you feel thatimpacted those visits with your mum?
- 5 A. Again, it didn't feel like a home, her home. It felt
- 6 more austere and unfriendly and intimidating to her,
- 7 I think. Probably one of the worst times was after I'd
- 8 been told she had Covid or had tested positive for
- 9 Covid. Clearly, she'd seen the changes to her room and
- 10 clearly seen perhaps a difference in what staff were
- wearing. And she said to me on my nightly phone call
- 12 "Is this it?" And that's the most awful conversation
- 13 I've had to have. And obviously, I tried to reassure
- her. As I said right at the beginning, she'd been an
- incredibly strong and resilient woman throughout her
- life, very powerful, very admirable. And, you know,
- ille, very powerful, very autilitable. Alia, you know
- 17 very matter-of-factly, "Is this it?" And I couldn't
- 18 say, "Yes, it is." You know, I think perhaps I was in
- 19 denial a bit myself because she was asymptomatic and
- 20 because, you know, she was so strong, I thought perhaps
- 21 she could pull through it. Naively, of course, but you
- 22 hope for the best in these situations.
 - But it was very difficult, and I think the change in the environment put that idea into her head too.
 - Q. In terms of your -- in terms of how you were able to
- 1 you?

A. It was.

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- 3 Q. And distressing. I just want to touch, if I may, then,
- 4 on the funeral arrangements. And you explain that it
- 5 was really at this point that you were able to touch
- 6 your mum again as part of those end-of-life rituals and
- 7 the care that was being undertaken by the undertakers.
- 8 Your mum had paid for a funeral plan herself, she had
- 9 set it all up, but they were unable to facilitate that,
- and so you chose, understandably, to move to a different
- 11 undertakers who could facilitate that?
- 12 A. Yes, yes.
- 13 Q. And did that bring some level -- small level of comfort
- 14 to you?
- 15 A. Yes, it did ultimately. There was a lot of additional
- 16 trauma that shouldn't have been there, really. But
- 17 again, you know, I think funeral directors were
- 18 following guidelines, just as care homes were following
- 19 guidelines. So they were making their own decisions.
- There was no law to allow, you know, people to have the
- 21 comfort and humanity of being with loved ones, living or
- dead. But it was a huge relief to me, yes, to be able
- 23 to provide a provider, and the original funeral home did
- 24 actually help me in finding someone who would allow me

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25 to visit, and yes, I spent as much time as I could with

- 1 visit, you were still socially distancing, as I
- 2 understand it?
- 3 A. Yes.
- 4 Q. So you were still a metre or so away from her --
- 5 A. Yes
- 6 Q. -- at the end of the bed?
- 7 A. Yes. So, again, it seemed so cruel. I couldn't be
- 8 posing any kind of threat at that point. So as I said,
- 9 for ten months, even as she lay dying, I could have no
- physical contact with her. And, you know, I remember
- when I lost my dad in 2010, and he was dying, I promised
- 12 him that I would look after my mum, and I just felt that
- 13 I'd let her down so badly. And that guilt is just with
- 14 me always
- 15 Q. And certainly -- but you were there when she passed
- 16 away -- with her?
- 17 A. Yes
- 18 Q. And you stayed for a while after that, as I understand
- 19 it. with her?
- 20 A. I did. I did, yeah. One of the nurses went to tell
- 21 Mike, who was in the car park, what had happened, and he
- was allowed to come round to the door to check on me,
- but he still wasn't allowed to come into the room.
- Which, again, makes no sense to me.
- 25 Q. It must have been an incredibly lonely experience for
 - my mum, while I could.
- 2 **Q.** Of course.
- 3 And then, as you describe then, a funeral taking
- 4 place in accordance with the restrictions at the time.
- 5 A. Yes.

- 6 Q. Socially distanced --
- 7 A. Yes.
- 8 Q. -- and all of those restrictions in place.
- 9 If I may turn on, really, to one aspect of her
- 10 legacy, if I may. You've been since -- subsequently
- 11 involved in quite a significant amount of campaigning
- work, and that's covered within your statement in some
- 40 Little Little Little Control Contro
- detail, and also working with One Dementia Voice.
- 14 A. Yes.
- 15 Q. And one aspect that you consider to be very important,
- 16 is about either granting a family member or a friend,
- 17 firstly -- within the pandemic, it was key worker
- 18 status?
- 19 **A.** Yes.
- 20 Q. But more broadly, now, a legal right, effectively?
- 21 A. Absolutely.
- 22 Q. And you're a supporter of what's called Gloria's Law?
- 23 **A.** Yes.
- 24 Q. Would you like to tell us just a little bit about that?
- 25 I know it's important to you.

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- 1 A. It's absolutely critical to me. You know, after my 2 experience, and witnessing my mum's deterioration 3 through a screen, that didn't have to happen. She could 4 have had -- she could have had the comfort and love of 5 a family member, and she could have had my support, 6 continually, with her health and wellbeing.
 - And to have been denied that, to me, seems absolutely immoral. Against all human rights, I believe. And so, quite a shock to me, I did become --I am a campaigner. You know, I didn't choose activism, I was activated. I really, really passionately believe in Gloria's Law, which is the legal right to a care supporter.
 - And it absolutely has to be legal because we saw what happened with guidelines. Everyone approached them differently. They changed all the time. But to give someone legal status and that peace of mind and reassurance I think is absolutely critical for a humane society
- 20 MS CECIL: Thank you very much for sharing your story with 21
- 22 I've no further questions, my Lady.
- 23 LADY HALLETT: You've become a very eloquent campaigner, so 24 you may have missed your vocation, I think.
- 25 Thank you very much indeed for helping the Inquiry.
- 1 you were warned. And if at any stage you need a break, 2 please just say, I'm sure Ms Jung has told you, but you 3 may find it easier to get it over with, because I know 4 it won't be easy.
- 5 THE WITNESS: Thank you.
- 6 Questions from COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY
- 7 MS JUNG: Could you start by giving us your full name, 8 please.
- 9 A. Judith Kilbee.
- Q. And you've provided a witness statement dated 10 2 May 2025. That's at INQ000614380. 11
- 12 A.

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- 13 **Q.** Is it right that you have a background in nursing?
- 14 A. Yes, I do.
- Q. And you've worked in nursing homes before? 15
- A. Nursing home and care homes. 16
- 17 Q. And care homes. And you've also worked as a business
- 18 manager for a specialist care home group?
- A. Yes, that's correct. 19
- 20 Q. So it's fair to say that you're fairly knowledgeable and

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- experienced in the way that care homes operate? 21
- 22 A. Generally, yes.
- 23 Q. You've come today to talk about your personal
- 24 experience; is that right?
- 25 A. That's right.

- 1 I know it doesn't help for me to say it, but you did
- 2 keep your promise and you did look after her to the best
- 3 of your ability. So, I don't know if I'll forget the
 - image of you sitting outside in January, wrapped up, in
- 5 an English winter -- or a British winter. I'm so sorry
- 6 for what happened at the end, but try to remember the
- 7 positives of your life together, and we shall
- 8 investigate the negatives.
- 9 THE WITNESS: Thank you so much, my Lady.
- 10 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed.
- 11 THE WITNESS: Thank you. As I said, earlier, really,
 - really, it shouldn't be care home managers and
- 13 politicians deciding whether we can care for our loved
- 14 ones. It really shouldn't.
- 15 LADY HALLETT: I think there will be many people who
- 16 obviously will remember the awful number of deaths
- 17 during the pandemic, but hadn't really appreciated this
- 18 particular point that you made so eloquently. So thank
- 19 you very much indeed.
- 20 THE WITNESS: Thank you, my Lady.
- LADY HALLETT: Ms Jung. 21
- 22 MS JUNG: My Lady, the next witness is Mrs Judith Kilbee.
 - MS JUDITH KILBEE (affirmed)
- 24 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much for coming along to help
- 25 us. Sorry we kept you waiting for a short time. I hope
- 1 Q. And that's in relation to one particular care home in
- 2 Scotland that your dad was in and sadly died in on
- 3 10 May 2020?
- 4 A. Yes.
- 5 Q. Before we talk about your dad's time in the home, could
- 6 you just tell us a little bit about your dad, please,
- 7 about his character, his sense of humour, what he liked
- 8 to do.
- 9 A. He was a Geordie. He had a great sense of humour, as
- 10 I think many of them do. He loved nature, he loved the
- 11 environment. He always stood up for people that he felt
- 12 were mistreated. He taught all his children lots about
- 13 nature and, you know, we were hounded by "What's that
- 14 bird?" when we went for a walk; you never had any peace.
- 15 And he invested those interests into all of his
- 16
- grandchildren as well. He -- I never heard him say 17
- a bad word about anyone. He was a happy, sociable
- 18
- 19 Q. And is it right that he had eight grandchildren?
- 20 He had eight grandchildren, yes.
- And he loved spending time with his family? 21
- 22 A. Yes, very much so. And he was very practical and he
- 23 always wanted to help when he came to visit, so he was,
- 24 yeah, a very genuine person.
- 25 Q. Is it right that your dad was diagnosed with

- 1 Alzheimer's?
- 2 A. Yes, shortly -- a couple of years after my mum died.
- 3 But that Alzheimer's manifested just, really, in
- 4 short-term memory loss. He never changed his
- 5 personality or lost his sense of humour. He was always
- 6 grateful. He wasn't someone that would wander. He --
- 7 you know, he was still driving before he went into the
- 8 home after the stroke.
- 9 Q. And when you say it really just affected his short-term
- 10 memory, did he need constant reminding, for example, to
- 11 take his medicine?
- 12 A. Yes, latterly at home we were having to ring up and
- remind him, and, you know, plan meals for him and that
- 14 kind of thing, to make sure that he looked after
- 15 himself.
- 16 Q. You mention that he was still driving. He was fairly
- 17 independent, was he?
- 18 A. He was very independent, loved getting out for drives in
- 19 the countryside. And yes, so he'd relied on his car
- 20 because he lived in a small village and that took him to
- 21 all his activities.
- 22 Q. One thing in particular that he very much enjoyed doing
- 23 is going to a place called Healthy Hearts; is that
- 24 right?
- 25 A. Yes.

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- 1 going to see him tomorrow."
- So I was -- called down to see him, found him
- 3 confused and unstable on his feet, and he had a stroke
 - in front of me. So I knew there was something
- 5 happening, and I was right.
- 6 Q. And is it right that, as a result of that, he spent
- 7 three weeks in hospital?
- 8 A. He did, yes.
- 9 Q. And it was after that that the decision was made that he
- 10 should go into a care home?
- 11 A. Yes. He wouldn't have managed at home immediately
- following the stroke, so the decision was made then.
- 13 Q. Could I ask you just to slow down a tiny bit, please,
- 14 Ms Kilbee?
- 15 A. Sorry. Certainly.
- 16 Q. Thank you.
- 17 So he went into a care home in Scotland; it was
- 18 a small care home. Is that right?
- 19 **A.** Yes
- 20 Q. It was based in Scotland but had a head office in
- 21 England?
- 22 A. It did, yes.
- 23 Q. Your dad made a full recovery from the stroke, didn't
- 24 he?
- 25 A. Completely.

- Q. And is that someone where he would go and exercise andsocialise?
- 3 A. Yes, he had a stent put in many years ago and that was
 - part of the local health board offering, which was
- 5 cardiac rehabilitation. So he went for something like
- 6 15 years, twice a week, and he would do volleyball and
- 7 aerobics. And that --
- 8 Q. And did that -- sorry to interrupt you.
- 9 A. Sorry. And that continued up until he had that stroke.
- 10 Q. And was that very much a support for him after your
- 11 mother died?
- 12 A. Yes, it was. Because she used to go sometimes with him
- and just take part in the exercises, but it was
- 14 a structure for him. You know, he would mark his
- 15 calendar. Because of his memory, he'd have a red heart
- on each of the days that he went to Healthy Hearts, so
- 17 his calendar always told him which day it was.
- 18 Q. You mention that your dad had a stroke. Was that in
- 19 September 2018?
- 20 A. Yes, it was.
- 21 Q. And you were with him at the time?
- 22 A. Yes, I'd spoken to him on the phone the night before,
- and came off the phone and said to my husband, "I feel
- 24 Dad's -- there's something wrong. He says he's not
- 25 depressed but his voice is weak, it's thready. I'm

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- Q. And in January 2019 you arranged for him to start
- 2 attending Healthy Hearts again once a week; is that
- 3 right?

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- 4 A. Yes, because of the nature of the home, it was so small
- 5 that he would be lucky if he'd walk 20 steps from one --
- from A to, B and there wasn't a garden per se, there was
- 7 a little courtyard out the back. So I felt that for his
- 8 mental wellbeing and mobility he needed to be doing some
- 9 activities. So I felt that it was time to try it, and
- spoke to Healthy Hearts and the home, who agreed, but
- 11 the home couldn't take him because they didn't have the
- 12 staff capacity.
- 13 Q. So the home was nearby Healthy Hearts --
- 14 **A.** It was.
- 15 Q. -- but they weren't able to help with that?
- 16 **A.** No.
- 17 Q. So is it right that you did a 100-mile round trip to
- 18 take your dad --
- 19 A. Once a week, it wasn't twice a week at that point, it
- 20 was once a week, and if I couldn't do it because I was
- 21 away with work my husband kindly would step in and do
- 22 that. So we felt it was important to keep Dad mobile
- and keep him in that environment.
- ${\bf 24}~{\bf Q}.~$ And were you able to see any benefit in him attending
- 25 Healthy Hearts?

- 1 A. Massively. He would forget where he was going and say,
- 2 "Where is this place?" And as soon as he walked in --
- well, even before he walked in, he'd walk through the
- 4 car park and he'd a face he recognised and start
- 5 chatting to them. And muscle memory was there, when the
- 6 music started he knew which aerobics he was going to do
- 7 to each particular piece of music. So it was really
- 8 beneficial for him, yes.
- 9 Q. Thank you, Ms Kilbee.
- Can we now move on, please, to some of the infection prevention control measures --
- 12 A. Certainly.
- 13 Q. -- at the home, because it's right, isn't it, that you
- 14 had some serious concerns about the measures that were
- 15 in place there?
- 16 A. I didn't feel that they were really understanding or set
- 17 up to do proper infection prevention and control.
- 18 Q. Okay. We're going to go through some of those concerns.
- 19 It's right, isn't it, that your dad's birthday was on
- 20 12 March 2020?
- 21 A. Yes.
- 22 Q. And that's the last time you were able to see him in
- 23 person?
- 24 A. Yes.
- ${\bf 25}~{\bf Q}.~{\bf And}$ on that day did you take him out to the
 - 37
- 1 prepared some birthday cake; is that right?
- 2 A. Yes.

- 3 Q. And your dad blew out the candles and shared his cake
- 4 with the other residents. Were they together in the
- 5 same room when they did that?
- 6 A. They were, there were a few residents in the room, but
- 7 they all congregated. There were few numbers in the
 - home so they would congregate around a large dining
- 9 table, so we didn't see him having the cake with them
- but they got him to blow out the candles and then they
- were taking the cake to the table for everyone to share.
- 12 And I remember thinking at the time, I didn't say
- anything to them at the time, but thinking this is maybe
- 14 normal practice in the past, but this is, you're not
- 15 aware of the Covid issue. This shouldn't be happening
- 16 now.
- 17 Q. Did it appear to you that the staff understood what the
- 18 potential risks were?
- 19 A. Not at that time no.
- 20 Q. You say that there was some hand gel available at the
- 21 care home?
- 22 A. Yes, there was.
- 23 $\,$ **Q.** And visitors were encouraged to use that gel?
- 24 A. Yes
- 25~ $\,$ Q. $\,$ Were there any other measures in place that you could

- 1 countryside --
- 2 A. We did.
- 3 Q. -- with some tea and some cake?
- 4 A. We did, it was something my parents did often. They
- 5 would take a flask and go out and sit somewhere looking
- 6 at nature. We made it very clear to the home that
- 7 that's what we were doing and emphasised that we weren't
- 8 taking Dad anywhere near people. We wouldn't have taken
- 9 him into a café or anything, because we were really
- 10 concerned about the Covid situation. So that's what we
- 11 did.
- 12 Q. And why did you feel the need to tell the home where you
- were going, and the fact that you weren't going to go
- 14 near people?
- 15 A. Because we felt that they hadn't quite grasped the
- 16 enormity of what was coming, and having seen the images
- on TV in Spain and Italy in care homes, we were acutely
- aware of it, and really wanted to hammer that point
- 19 home.
- 20 Q. And when you said this to the manager, do you remember
- 21 what the manager's response was?
- 22 A. I asked him about reducing footfall through the home,
- and urged him to do so, and was told "We haven't been
- 24 told to lock down yet."
- 25 Q. When you got back to the home, they had very kindly
 - 3
- 1 see?
- 2 A. Not that we could see at that time, no.
- 3 Q. And it's right, isn't it, that that day you waited for
- 4 him outside the toilets so you could remind him to wash
- 5 his hands?
- 6 A. Yes, because he was mobile and independent in that way,
- 7 but I wanted to make sure that he didn't just wash his
- 8 hands and just run them under the tap. I wanted to make
- 9 sure he did it properly.
- 10 Q. And was that something he needed reminding to do?
- 11 A. Not to wash his hands, no, but to use the gel or to wash
- 12 his hands thoroughly, yes.
- 13 Q. Is it right that a week later, there was a review due in
- 14 regard to your father, and you suggested meeting
- 15 remotely for that?
- 16 A. We actually said we wouldn't come in for it, because we
- didn't want, again, emphasising the footfall through the
- home, so we wanted to do that remotely, yes.
- 19 Q. And the manager's response was to meet in the
- 20 conservatory instead, which would avoid going into the
- 21 home. What were your concerns with that?
- 22 A. We refused to do that because we said that "Although
- you're -- we're meeting in the conservatory, you're
- 24 meeting us and then you're going back into the home,
- which is the same as us, to my mind, going into the

- 1 home."
- 2 Q. Can I ask you about the recruitment of staff, please.
- 3 In April 2020, is it right that you saw a notice from,
- 4 I think you say in your statement that it was Public
- 5 Health Scotland but could it have been the local public
- 6 health teams?
- 7 A. Which statement, sorry?
- 8 Q. In your witness statement you refer to a statement from
- 9 Public Health Scotland about capacity and offering staff
- support if needed. Do you know if that could have been
- 11 from the local public health teams rather than Public
- 12 Health Scotland?
- 13 A. It may well have been. I certainly, when I heard of --
- 14 they're planning to bring staff in, I did find in
- writing something that said to contact the local team,
- or the team -- I thought it was Public Health
- 17 Scotland -- who would help with staffing.
- 18 Q. And is it right that you saw an advert from the care
- 19 group advertising for temporary staff?
- 20 A. Yes, they were advertising within their own network on
- 21 Instagram, advertising for temporary staff.
- 22 Q. You say that they were asking particularly for
- 23 school-leavers and shop assistants?
- 24 A. Mm.
- 25 Q. Do you know why they were asking for those in
 - 41
- 1 concerned about their knowledge of PPE and IPC measures?
- 2 A. Yes, I was.
- 3 Q. On 18 April 2020, the manager came in with symptoms; is
- 4 that right?
- 5 **A.** Yes.
- 6 Q. And he thought that it was just a cold?
- 7 A. Yes.
- 8 Q. And I think the next day he did a test, I think you say
- 9 because he wanted to prove that it was just a cold.
- 10 A. Yes, he did.
- 11 Q. And in fact the test came back positive; is that right?
- 12 A. Yes.
- 13 Q. Do you know if there was any policy or protocol in place
- 14 at the time about what staff should do if they had
- 15 symptoms?
- 16 A. I don't know what their own policies were. I think
- 17 certainly there were staff that were isolating after
- 18 that, so I think they did stay away from work, but
- 19 obviously he'd been in with what he thought was a cold,
- which proved to be Covid.
- 21 Q. And on 21 April, you emailed the home to ask about
- 22 testing of residents --
- 23 **A.** Yes.
- 24 $\,$ Q. -- and staff, and that's because of the recent Scottish
- 25 guidance that had been issued?
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- 1 particular?
- 2 A. Presumably because they were low paid and they would be
- 3 available
- 4 Q. Do you know if they took up the offer from the local
- 5 public health teams for extra support for staffing?
- 6 A. I don't know if they even approached them.
- 7 Q. And it's right, isn't it, that soon afterwards there
- 8 were, indeed, some new staff at the care home?
- 9 **A.** Yes, there were several youngsters.
- 10 Q. When you say youngsters, I think in some cases they were
- 11 the teenage offspring of the care staff?
- 12 A. Certainly of people that were associated with the home,
- 13 yes.
- 14 Q. And do you know what kind of jobs they were given? Were
- 15 they given any jobs relating to personal care?
- 16 A. I was asked -- I asked about this and asked if they
- 17 would be given appropriate training and was told that
- they'd be given suitable training for the tasks they had
- 19 to complete. So I assumed it would include personal
- 20 care
- 21 Q. Do you know what PPE they were given to wear?
- 22 A. I don't think at that time anyone was wearing PPE.
- 23 I don't think the guidance had come through at that
- 24 point.
- 25 Q. But is it right that you were at that point very
 - 4
- 1 A. Yes.
- 2 Q. And can you tell us what your particular concern was?
- 3 A. My concern was that as their head office was based in
- 4 England, that they appeared to be following
- 5 England-centric guidance, and I didn't think they were 6 very aware of what the local guidance was saying and
- 7 I wanted to make sure that if there was testing
- 8 available, that they were aware of that, because up
- 9 until that point there hadn't been testing for every
- 10 resident.
- 11 Q. And did it change after that?
- 12 A. I believe shortly after that there was people -- the
- testing was for people showing symptoms, and very
- 14 quickly after that, pretty much everybody, albeit not on
- the same day, was showing symptoms, and therefore
- 16 tested. But they were tested in batches of a couple of
- 17 people at a time.
- 18 Q. Can I ask you about the isolation of residents?
- 19 **A.** Yes.
- 20 Q. There came a time, didn't there, when your dad was
- 21 isolated, and it was decided to isolate him in the
- lounge area, whereas all of the other residents I think
- 23 were isolated in their rooms. Can you tell us why it
- 24 was decided that your dad would be isolated in the
- 25 lounge?

- 1 A. I think because he was mobile, and sociable, it was
- 2 decided by the home, along with my power of attorney
- 3 siblings that isolating him -- in inverted commas
- 4 "isolating" -- in the lounge was the best thing for him.
- 5 No attempt was made to isolate him in his room.
- 6 Q. And when you say in inverted commas "isolating", is that
- 7 because it was really the hub of the building where
- 8 staff would go during their breaks and people would go
- 9 in and out?
- 10 A. Yes, the two sides of the building were connected by the
- 11 lounge, so to get from one half of the building to the
- 12 other everyone went through the lounge. So it literally
- 13 was the hub of the building.
- 14 Q. You were concerned that your dad was at greater risk by
- being there. Do you remember what your manager's
- 16 response was to your concerns?
- 17 A. His response was that "Don't worry, we have new guidance
- 18 coming -- I'll send it to you -- to show the PPE that
- 19 we're going to be using." And reassured me that nobody
- 20 would be allowed in the lounge without a mask.
- 21 Q. And was that guidance saying that PPE should be worn for
- 22 all sessional care? So that was a mask, apron and
- 23 gloves, that would start when entering a resident's room
- 24 and end when leaving?
- 25 **A.** Yes, and my concern there was what was a session? In
 - 45
- 1 Q. And your dad's test came back positive on 25 April 2020?
- 2 A. It did, yes.
- 3 Q. Along with four other residents?
- 4 A. Yes.
- 5 Q. Is it right that the next day you heard that staff were
- 6 travelling from the Midlands to help out in the home?
- 7 A. Yes.
- 8 Q. And your concern about that was that they may be
- 9 bringing Covid with them into the home?
- 10 A. They were coming from an area that was a hotspot at the
- 11 time for Covid, and my concern was that there may be
- 12 different viral strains. Another concern was that you
- 13 weren't allowed to travel those distances, and you
- 14 weren't supposed to be moving people from one home to
- 15 the other, let alone from one country to another. And
- 16 also concerned about the quarantining of those
- 17 individuals and testing.
- 18 Q. Did you raise those concerns?
- 19 **A.** I did.
- 20 Q. What response did you get?
- 21 A. I was assured that they would be appropriately
- 22 quarantined and tested.
- 23 Q. Do you know if that happened?
- 24 A. I don't know for certain, but they were in the home
- 25 within a couple of days, so I doubt very much that that

- 1 Dad's case, if he was being brought from his room
- 2 upstairs, down the stairs along the corridor and into
- 3 the lounge, where did the session start and end, and
- 4 where did the PPE changing start and end?
- 5 $\,$ Q. Do you know if the care home had sufficient PPE to
- 6 follow that guidance?
- 7 A. I believe they did and I know that in the early part of
- 8 the pandemic, before lockdown, the manager actually
- 9 travelled to south of -- to middle of England to get
- 10 extra PPE from their head office, as well. So I think
- 11 it was available in Scotland and they sourced their own.
- 12 $\,$ **Q.** And did your dad have any hand-washing facilities in the
- 13 lounge area?
- 14 **A.** No
- 15 Q. And your concern, is it right, was that he would then be
- 16 touching door handles and things like that that staff
- 17 and other people would be using?
- 18 A. Yes, because he would take himself to the toilet and
- 19 touch things on the way. And if he wasn't escorted to
- do that, how did anyone know that those things were
- 21 clean?
- 22 Q. Is it right that the day that the guidance came out,
- your dad and other residents started displaying
- 24 symptoms?
- 25 **A.** Yes.

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- 1 happened.
- 2 Q. And in terms of their uniforms, is it right that, rather
- 3 than wearing scrubs or uniforms that could be put
- 4 through a hot wash, they were wearing tee shirts but
- 5 otherwise just their own clothes.
- 6 A. That applied to all staff. I think the guidance came
- 7 out about bagging of uniforms and washing them on the
- 8 premises in a hot wash, but literally the home issued
- 9 tee shirts, and in some photographs they came down to
- 10 people's elbows, so -- and they wore their own trousers
- or whatever as well.
- 12 Q. On 27 April, you called the home and your dad was
- 13 Covid positive at this point; is that right?
- 14 A. Yes.
- 15 Q. And you were told by a staff member that your dad had
 - had a lovely time playing in the lounge with balloons
- 17 with some of the staff; is that right?
- 18 **A.** Yes

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- 19 Q. And why did that cause you concern?
- 20 A. Well, obviously I wasn't there and I wasn't able to see,
- 21 but the idea of a Covid-sick person playing balloons in
- a lounge didn't seem to make any sense to me on any
- 23 level. I mean, they may have blown them up with
- a machine, I don't know, but it didn't make any sense to
- 25 me.

- 1 And I was also concerned that if there were 2 sufficient staff to play balloons in the lounge, why 3 were those staff not being utilised to help isolate my 4 father in his room, which could easily have been done as 5 there was an office next door.
- 6 Q. And it's right, isn't it, that in the following days,
- 7 you also saw some photographs of your dad and staff
- 8 members standing fairly close to him. Were they wearing
- 9 PPE?
- 10 A. No. We were sent a photograph from a relative who went
- 11 and visited through the window, and it showed the staff
- 12 member standing less than two feet from Dad, in
- 13 a long-sleeved shirt buttoned at the wrist. No apron,
- 14 no mask, no gloves.
- 15 Q. And is it right that you found out afterwards that that
- 16 staff member in fact had a cough when he was looking
- 17 after your dad?
- 18 A. When I spoke to him after Dad died, he said, "Well,
- 19 actually today is the first day that I haven't had
- 20 a cough.'
- 21 Q. Your dad became a bit unsteady on his feet; is that
- 22 right?
- 23 A. He did, yes.
- 24 Q. And started having to be accompanied to the toilet?
- 25 **A.** They volunteered that they were now accompanying him to
- 1 they didn't have a cleaner. I was concerned that if
- 2 they moved Dad to that room, everything would have to be
- 3 cleaned, as per the -- the guidance, which would have
- 4 involved long floor-to-ceiling curtains being cleaned
- 5 thoroughly and furniture cleaned. I didn't see how that
- 6 was going to be done in the Covid circumstances.
- 7 Q. So the cleaning was going to be done by the staff, and
 - is it right that that day four staff tested positive for
- 9 Covid?
- 10 **A.** Yes.

- 11 Q. Along with some further residents, I think eight out of
- 12 nine?
- 13 **A.** Yes.
- 14 Q. You were sent some further photographs of your dad, and
- 15 you were quite upset by one in particular. Do you
- 16 remember the photograph I'm talking about --
- 17 **A.** Yes.
- 18 $\,$ Q. -- where you turned to your husband and you said your
- 19 dad was dying?
- 20 A. Yes, my husband and I had been for a walk and we'd got
- 21 home and a message came through from my brother, he sent
- me a picture of Dad taken through the window, and
- 23 I barely recognised him. And I just took one look at
- 24 him and turned to my husband and said, "Dad's dying."
- 25 Q. You also received a video the following day?

- 1 the toilet because he was unsteady. And that just
- 2 screamed to me: why weren't you doing that in the first
- 3 place, to make sure of the hygiene and the infection
- 4 control?
- 5 Q. And on 1 May, he started showing signs of poor balance,
- 6 decreased mobility and laboured breathing; is that
- 7 right?
- 8 A. Yes.
- 9 $\,$ $\,$ $\,$ Q. $\,$ An ambulance was called on that day. Did they say that
- 10 they were not minded to take him to hospital?
 - 11 A. Yes, they did.
 - 12 Q. It was suggested that he have a sample taken to see if
- 13 he had an infection, a urine tract infection?
- 14 A. Yes
- 15 Q. And in fact he had some antibiotics and he got a little
- 16 bit better; is that right?
- 17 A. That's right.
- 18 Q. And is it right that he was moved -- or on 30 April the
- suggestion was made to move him into a room downstairs.
- 20 Your concerns about that was that that room had been
- 21 previously lived in by a resident who had died of Covid?
- 22 A. Yes
- 23 Q. And who was going to be carrying out the cleaning of
- 24 that room?
- 25 A. The staff in the care home did the cleaning also, so

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- 1 **A.** Yes.
- 2 Q. How did he look in that?
- 3 A. Grey, disorientated. Dad was musical, he could recite
- 4 long poems and he was trying to clap along to music and
- 5 he couldn't even coordinate his hands to clap. He was
- 6 clearly -- to me, clearly hypoxic and extremely unwell.
- 7 Q. And it's right, isn't it, that in fact at 11.30 pm that
- 8 day, he was very unwell with low oxygen sats and the
- 9 manager called 999?
- 10 A. Yes.
- 11 Q. They told him to call 111.
- 12 A. Mm-hmm. They did. Sorry, not "mm-hmm". Yes.
- 13 Q. And do you remember what the doctor said?
- 14 A. The doctor said, "We don't take Covid-positive residents
- 15 to hospital. Order the end-of-life pack."
- 16 Q. And did it appear to you at the time that your dad was
- 17 in need of an end-of-life pack?
- 18 A. It appeared to me at the time that Dad needed oxygen and
- 19 support, and I knew that he needed help, if he was going
- 20 to recover.
- 21 Q. Is it right that you yourself called 111?
- 22 A. I did. I was -- I think in the end it was possibly 2 in
- 23 the morning before I managed to speak to somebody, but
- 24 I'd read in the press a statement from the local medical
- 25 director a week earlier saying that there was absolutely

no barrier to care home residents with Covid going into hospital, and they were sitting at 55% occupancy, and there was absolutely no reason why they wouldn't be admitted.

So I knew that was the case, and what I did was challenge why that statement was made, because that wasn't Scottish Government guidance, and it wasn't local guidance. And the doctor on 111 was extremely aggressive, and said to me, "So you want me to admit your father now?" And I said, "No, I want my dad to be given the treatment that he needs when he needs it." And he reluctantly then agreed to send the Covid team in the following day.

- 14 And is it right that when the Covid team came to the 15 home and the consultant saw your dad, he agreed that 16 your dad was not at the end of his life?
- 17 A. Yes, it was a she, but ...
- Q. A she. Sorry. 18

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- 19 Α. She -- I made sure that I spoke with her. She said,
- 20 "Your dad is certainly not end of life. His chest is
- 21 clear but he needs rest, so we'll set some parameters."
- 22 There was a long conversation about -- which I referred
- 23 to as the tipping point. How do we get intervention for
- 24 Dad before he passes that tipping point where it's not
- going to be helpful? And that's why she set up the 25
- 1 Yes, they were measuring pulse oximetry, but I didn't 2 feel that they knew the signs of hypoxia, and that's 3 because of various calls they'd made. So when they had 4 called for help for Dad and they were asked by the 5 person on 111 "Is he distressed?", the statement back to 6 the doctor was "No, he is not distressed."

But he was sitting in a chair all night. He was sitting in a chair all night. And he never did that. He never did that. He was doing that because he couldn't breathe.

But they didn't understand what respiratory distress looked like. He wasn't aggressive or distressed, therefore he wasn't distressed. They couldn't report properly to the medical staff.

- 15 And when you say he was sitting all day, it's right, 16 isn't it, that he was in fact moved to that residents 17 room that we discussed earlier?
- A. Yes. 18

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- Q. And is it right that, rather than having his chair moved 19 20 from the lounge, you saw from the photographs that he
- 21 was in fact sitting in the chair that belonged to the
- 22 previous resident --Yes.
- 24 Q. -- who had Covid?
- 25 Α. Yes.

23 Α.

- 1 parameters that she did.
- 2 Q. And was it agreed that if his oxygen saturation fell
- 3 below 92% the Covid team should be called; however, if
- 4 they fell below 88 per cent that should trigger
- 5 a 999 call?
- 6 A. Yes.
- 7 Q. And your dad should be taken to hospital if needed?
- 8 Α.
- 9 Q. She said that his chest was clear but that he was
- 10 exhausted and needed rest; is that right?
- 11 Α.
- 12 Q. And reassured you that there was no blanket policy of
- 13 not admitting care residents to --
- 14 A. Yes, she did.
- 15 Q. Over the next few days, is it right that you remained
- 16 anxious and distressed?
- 17 A. Yes, I was --
- 18 Q. Sorry.
- 19 Yeah, very much so. It was like everything we were
- 20 thinking about all the time.
- 21 **Q.** You were obviously worried about your dad's health.
- 22 A.
- 23 Q. But is it also the case that you were concerned that the
- 24 staff that were looking after him were not trained or
- 25 knowledgeable about the signs to look out for?

- 1 Q. And do you know if that chair had been cleaned?
- 2 It was a fabric chair. It was a friend of mine's mum
- 3 who had died in that room. I knew it was the same
- 4 chair. Dad's bed was not his bed; it was the same bed
- 5 as that lady had. And I don't think anything had been
- 6 deep cleaned. It may have been cleaned, but to my
- 7 knowledge the curtains were never taken down.
- 8 I saw the personalised things, his photographs and 9 things in the room, but I could clearly see that it
- 10 wasn't his own furniture.
- 11 Q. And your dad became unwell again that day. He developed
- 12 a rash; is that right?
- 13 A. Yes.
- 14 Q. But by the time the doctor came the rash had gone?
- 15 A.
- Q. And the doctor said not to call again unless his oxygen 16
- 17 sats dropped below 75%?
- 18 Yes. Α.
- 19 Q. A sustained period?
- 20 A. Yes.
- 21 Q. That was inconsistent with what you had been told
- 22 previously.
- 23 It was inconsistent with what I'd been told, and
- 24 I believe it was inconsistent with life.
- 25 Q. And in fact the night before your dad died, he had sats

- 1 of 85% and had been grunting all night; is that right?
- 2 **A.** Yes.
- 3 Q. Is it right that you were told in the afternoon that
- 4 your dad was nearing death?
- 5 A. Yes, I was told in the morning that he was grunting all
- 6 night, which rang alarm bells for me, and then got
- 7 a call later to say, "Your dad is end of life, it could
- 8 be days -- it could be hours, or it could be days." And
- 9 we jumped in the car immediately.
- 10 Q. You live 90 minutes away --
- 11 A. Yes.
- 12 Q. -- from the home. Did you get there in time --
- 13 **A.** No.
- 14 Q. -- to see your dad?
- 15 **A.** We pulled over about 3 miles away because I got a phone
- call, and we didn't get there in time, no.
- 17 $\,$ Q. One of your brothers was there with your dad; is that
- 18 right?
- 19 A. Yes.
- 20 Q. And he was in full PPE?
- 21 A. Yes.

- 22 Q. But he was able to sit with your dad as he passed away?
- 23 A. Dad wasn't conscious or aware at that point, but he was
- in the room with him, yes.
- 25 **Q.** And is it right that you decided not to go into the
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- 1 I want to prevent other people going through this. It
 - had an impact in making me feel isolated from friends
- 3 and colleagues as they got back to normal. It made my
- 4 daughter suffer from real health anxiety, and very, very
- 5 anxious about both of us as her parents because of
- 6 seeing the loss of her granddad, to the point that we
- 7 didn't hug one another until we were all vaccinated.
- 8 So -- and, you know, we have lived with it. We are very
- 9 aware of Covid and there's still anxiety when we go into
- 10 crowded places, but we're all doing fine now and back to
- 11 normal, but it has had a lasting impact on all of us.
- 12 Q. And you talk about the funeral, and you say about that
- that there were no hugs, no collective memories of dad
- 14 and his life, no celebration of a life well lived, but
- 15 rather a complete absence of the usual support in the
- 16 grieving process; is that right?
- 17 A. Yes, it was -- no grandchildren could be there. There
- were only ten people allowed. He had four children,
- 19 they had their other -- their partners, so there were no
- 20 grandchildren. Our son gave us a letter to put in the
- grave. I don't know what that said. But that was all
- 22 he had.
- 23 $\,$ **Q.** Thank you, and since your dad's death the Scottish Covid

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- 24 Bereaved group has been a big support to you?
- 25 A. Hugely. Its -- finding people on Facebook in the early

- 1 room?
- 2 A. Yes, because our son drove us there. Our daughter came
- 3 from her home and we were all outside. My brother was
- 4 beckoning for me to come in, but knowing that the home
- 5 was full of Covid, and Dad was already gone, I wasn't
- 6 prepared to go in. But my brother had signalled to me
- 7 that he was -- he said, "Come in, I'm keeping him warm
- 8 for you." He had wrapped a blanket around him to keep
- 9 him warm for me getting there.
- 10 Q. Are you okay to carry on?
- 11 A. Yes, I'm fine.
- 12 Q. And in your statement you summarise the last 17 days of
- 13 your dad's life by saying that he had struggled for
- those days and died struggling to breathe without any
- oxygen, supportive fluids, or end-of-life medication to
- 16 alleviate his distress?
- 17 A. Yes
- 18 Q. You also mention the last words your dad said to you on
- 19 a video call. Do you remember what those were?
- 20 A. "When are you coming for me?"
- 21 Q. You say those words will haunt you forever.
- 22 **A.** Yes
- 23 Q. Can you just tell us a little bit more about the impact
- that your dad's death has had on you and your family?
- 25 **A.** It's had a huge impact, which is why I am here. Because

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- 1 days that actually got it, and understood what you were
- 2 going through was a huge support. And I was part of the
- 3 early group that started work on looking for inquiries
- 4 and wanting to make that happen.
- 5 $\,$ MS JUNG: Those are all the questions. I have. Thank you
- 6 very much for coming to assist the Inquiry.
- 7 THE WITNESS: Thank you.
- 8 LADY HALLETT: Ms Kilbee, when you suggested things to the
- 9 manager of the care home with your experience, how did
- 10 they take it? Did they think that you were interfering?
- 11 Did they think you were being helpful? What was the
- 12 response that you got?
- 13 A. I tried to be very balanced in what I did, and I was
- very aware, being a nurse, that every time somebody
- phoned, it was pulling them away from what they were
- 16 there to do. And as there were four of us and one
- 17 sibling was ringing every day, I would email and message
- 18 rather than phone. I was aware also of the hygiene of
- 19 passing phones around.

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- 20 Generally speaking, it was taken on board and seemed 21 to be appreciated, but I'm not sure that it actually
- 22 was, because there were statements made by the manager,
- things like "We'll be out of the woods now, we're on
- Day 14." And I had to tell him that the average person,
 - elderly person, died on day 18 to 21. And I was told

1 "You've dashed my hopes, I thought we were out of it." 2 So I think they were, at best, incredibly naive. 3 The comment was made "We have a mild version here." 4 LADY HALLETT: From your experience -- I mean, you've 5 obviously got a great deal of experience within the --6 as manager of a care home group, have you managed to 7 analyse whether this was -- the lack of implementation 8 of IPC measures was particular to this care home or this 9 group of care homes, or have you worked out whether this 10 was something that others in your group have found in other care homes? 11 12

THE WITNESS: I believe that it probably was happening in many care homes. I think the absence of Care Inspectorate going in, GPs going in, and relatives going in, meant that there were no checks and balances. How did people know what was going on?

I kept close to it by looking at WhatsApp messages, by -- there was a WhatsApp group for families, and I kept abreast of all the guidance and things, and when something needed flagging, I flagged it. But it was trying to get that balance right to not intrude.

I don't think we know what was going on in care homes. The doors were shut. And we didn't have access to see that. So I would imagine if -- what was happening in my dad's home was probably happening in

MS JUNG: Thank you, my Lady. The next witness is Agnes McCusker.

MS AGNES MCCUSKER (sworn)

LADY HALLETT: I don't know how long you've been at the hearing, I hope we haven't kept you waiting too long and that you've been looked after while you've been here.

7 THE WITNESS: No, Lady Hallett, I was very glad to have been
 8 here to have watched the previous two participants and
 9 I feel it has helped.

LADY HALLETT: Good. And you've heard what I've said to
 them, obviously. If you need a break, please just say
 but you may find it easier if we just plough on.

13 THE WITNESS: Yeah.

14 LADY HALLETT: But it's up do you. All right?

15 **THE WITNESS:** Okay, thank you.

Questions from COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY

17 MS JUNG: Can you start by giving us your full name, please.

18 A. Yes. My full name is Agnes McCusker.

19 Q. Thank you. You're quite softly spoken. Could I ask you20 just to try and keep your voice up please?

21 A. Okay.

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Q. It's very important that your evidence is heard. If ithelps, you can try and bring the microphone closer to

24 you.

25 **A.** Okay.

1 varying degrees across the board.

LADY HALLETT: But by this stage, as you say, we'd been
 seeing photographs of the impact of Covid and awful

4 impact particularly on the more elderly. It's extremel

impact particularly on the more elderly. It's extremely
 concerning, as obviously you were at the time, that care

6 homes who catered for the most vulnerable weren't

7 conscious of what they should be doing.

8 THE WITNESS: I agree.

9 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed for your help.

10 THE WITNESS: Thank you, my Lady.

11 LADY HALLETT: And I'm sorry you went through what you went

12 through. You obviously did your very best.

13 THE WITNESS: I did. And that -- I think that's one of the

14 hardest things that I did, my utmost. I guided and

15 helped at every step of the way to try to get the right

16 care for Dad and fulfil my promise to Mum that I would

17 look after him.

18 LADY HALLETT: You did your best.

19 **THE WITNESS:** And I did my best. I know I did. Thank you.

20 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed. We'll break now

21 and I shall return at 11.40.

22 (11.24 am)

23 (A short break)

24 (11.42 am)

25 **LADY HALLETT:** Ms Jung.

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1 **Q.** Thank you.

2 **A.** Okay.

3 Q. Thank you very much for coming today. You've come to

4 tell us the story about your mother; is that right?

5 A. That's correct.

6 Q. Who died in a care home in Northern Ireland --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. -- on 12 April 2020?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Was she about 94 years old at the time?

11 A. She was 94 when she went into the nursing home. She

was -- she would have been coming close to her 96th

13 birthday.

14 Q. And she'd been living in the care home for about

15 two years?

16 A. Yes, that's correct.

17 Q. Prior to that did she live with your brother?

18 A. Yes, she did. She lived at home, she lived with my

19 brother for -- she had never been in or out of hospital

so she had lived with him and various members of the

21 family would call with her, yeah.

22 Q. And was she very active and mobile?

23 A. Yes, well, all of her life she was. In recent years she

24 wasn't as active, but was able to do her housework, was

able to make herself and my brother some lunch, dinner,

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1 tea for anyone who called. Did all her own cleaning, 2 washing. I could have gone out on many a day and found 3 her taking all the ornaments off some unit and cleaning 4 them all. So she always kept herself busy. She never 5 sat down until it was, you know, near time at night to 6 go to bed.

- Q. And is it right that the reason she ended up going into 7 8 a home is that she had a fall?
- 9 A. Yes.

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- 10 Q. And then she struggled to get a care package in place?
- A. She got a fall and had to go to the local hospital where 11 12 it was diagnosed that she had a fracture of her pelvic 13 bone, and although they said they couldn't do a lot for 14 it, they would keep her in for a week under observation, 15 and they changed her medication, took her off quite 16 a few medications that they said she never needed to be 17 on, and they then said, when she was getting home, she 18 would need the help of two people to help her initially, 19 and she was visited then by the physiotherapist and 20 occupational therapist and a social worker then became 21 involved with us in terms of trying to get her a care 22 package. She lived in a rural country area, and the 23 care package at either side of her only stopped in the 24 towns closest to them, and my mother lived in the 25 middle.

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were never informed of when they called or who they spoke to. They would have probably needed a family member present, but we weren't told when the physiotherapist was coming to the home, so while we did enquire, we were told that the physiotherapist would come in once every so often and take my mother for a short walk, and determine what her mobility issues were. And we are just led to believe that that did happen but we never saw it happening. But her mobility didn't get better.

11 Q. So she was unable to get back on her feet by the time 12 the pandemic came; is that right?

Α. Yes, she was initially walking with the help of a walking frame and then she had another fall, but the other fall occurred when they moved her from nursing into residential, and we had great issues with her going into residential because we were told that the people in residential had a certain amount of mobility, could, if they wanted, go in and make themselves a cup of tea in a small kitchen and that, in their opinion, my mother only needed one person to help her. But she couldn't manage on her own. So being in residential, she wouldn't have had the one person there with her.

And we tried to get the home themselves to move her back to nursing care and they said no. And then 67

So they tried for weeks to get a care package, and as time went on, we then had to make a decision with the nursing home if my mother was going to stay there, because the time had run out, in their words, for them to find a care package, and the home wanted to know if she was staying or if she was going home to her own house.

Q. And did she suffer another fall against a radiator?

8 9 A. She suffered two more falls. One was on her 94th 10 birthday. We went to the nursing home with a birthday 11 cake and all the family turned up to find that she was 12 sitting at the front door in a wheelchair waiting to be 13 taken to hospital for an X-ray. So she was taken for an 14 X-ray and thankfully hadn't broken anything, and then 15 subsequently returned back to the nursing home again 16 where she was placed in nursing care. 17

The home had two separate parts. They had a nursing 18 care section and a residential section for a small 19 number of people at the back of the home.

- 20 When Covid came, was your mum living -- your mother was 21 living in the resident -- in the nursing section?
- 22 Α. Yes, she was.
- 23 **Q.** And did you try and get some physiotherapy support for 24 her to try and get her back on her feet?
- 25 **A**. Yes. Physiotherapists had called out at the home and we

1 I approached the social worker, who initially put my

2 mother -- helped my mother to get the placement, and she

3 said she would have a word in the nursing home and they

4 said no, we think she's fine in residential.

- 5 Q. But she did move to nursing and that's where she was --
- 6 A.
- 7 Q. -- when the pandemic hit?
- Yes. 8 Δ.
- Q. And did she have her own room? 9
- 10 A. She had her own room, yes.
- 11 Q. And could you tell us about her hearing, please.
- 12 A. Yes. When my mother was a child, she developed a bad 13 ear infection, and she knows -- she remembers that her 14 relatives, her parents took her to the local doctor at 15 the time, and he told her that the infection, although
- 16 she didn't feel anything, had been there for some time
- and that it might affect her hearing as she got older, 17
- 18 but she subsequently lost all hearing.
- 19 Q. In that ear?
- 20 In that ear. And at one stage, when she was maybe in 21 her seventies, they took her in and completely sealed 22 the eardrum. So she had no hearing in that ear and she
- 23 wore a hearing-aid in the other ear.
- 24 Is it right that she was very good at lipreading --
- 25 A. Excellent.

- 1 Q. -- (overspeaking) -- that her hearing wasn't very good?
- 2 A. Yes.
- 3 Q. And she relied on that to understand?
- 4 $\,$ A. She did quite a bit of the time. She relied on looking
- 5 face to face at us.
- 6 Q. And just continuing with her health generally, she was
- 7 never diagnosed with dementia but is it right that you
- 8 suspected that she might have mild dementia?
- 9 A. Yes, we suspected that she had what I suppose we would
- 10 have termed "older age" -- possibly -- "forgetfulness",
- 11 but it wasn't noticeable when her own immediate family
- 12 came in to see her. She noticed everything about us.
- 13 She recognised things. She knew the grandchildren when
- 14 they came in. She may not have remembered who was in
- three or four days before it, but she was alert and, you
- 16 know, knew what she was eating. She knew things that
- were going on on a day-to-day basis and she recognised
- 18 the staff.
- 19 Q. So she knew the staff.
- 20 A. Yes.
- 21 Q. She recognised her children. And is it right that she
- 22 had seven --
- 23 A. Yes.
- 24 Q. -- you've got -- seven children?
- 25 A. Yes.

- 1 didn't have to wait to visiting hours. They dropped in
- 2 and out for ten minutes, went around to see her, either
- 3 in the sitting room or in her bedroom. And all seemed
- 4 happy with her, you know. She would tell us who was in,
- 5 and they were just delighted to see her.
- 6 Q. And did your mother enjoy those visits?
- 7 A. She did. She did.
- 8 Q. Your mother was quite a quiet person; is that right?
- 9 A. That's right.
- 10 Q. Was she able to ask staff for things that she needed?
- 11 A. She was certainly able but she possibly came from
- 12 a generation where you don't bother people if they're
- very busy. The nursing staff have lots to do in here,
- 14 and unless this is something really important, she
- 15 wouldn't have asked for help.
- 16 Q. Whereas when her children came to visit, you or your
- 17 siblings would ask --
- 18 **A.** Yes.
- 19 Q. -- the nursing staff for things on behalf of your
- 20 mother?
- 21 **A.** Yes.
- 22 Q. And is it right that she wasn't the best at eating?
- 23 A. Yes, she --
- 24 $\,$ Q. In particular I think they served rice quite a lot at
- 25 the care home, which --

- 1 Q. And 13 grandchildren?
- 2 A. That's right.
- Q. And although she did have some memory issues, when the
 children and grandchildren came to visit her --
- 5 A. Yes
- 6 Q. -- she recognised them?
- 7 **A.** Yes.
- 8 Q. And she was able to remember who had been to see her
- 9 that day?
- 10 A. Yes.
- 11 Q. And she noticed small changes like haircuts and things?
- 12 A. Yes, small changes like haircuts. If you had something
- that she hadn't seen before, a new outfit, something
- 14 like that, she -- and she loved -- you know, she loved
- to get the newspaper brought in and she would read that
- in between visits of the daytime and the evening. And
- 17 when you were in the next visit, she would tell you
- something that, you know, she had read out of the paper.
- So although at an advanced age, she was fairly with it.
- 20 Q. And in the two years that she was in the care home
- 21 before the pandemic hit, is it right that her many
- grandchildren and children visited her on a daily basis?
- 23 A. Possibly not on a daily basis, because most of them
- 24 worked during the day. The ones who were available just
- 25 dropped in and out. It was open visiting, so they

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- 1 **A.** Yes.
- 2 Q. -- your mother wasn't greatly fond of?
- 3 **A.** No
- 4 Q. And so is it right that you and your siblings would
- 5 bring cooked food for your mum that you knew that she
- 6 liked?
- 7 A. Yes. Not so much in terms of meals cooked, because
- 8 I probably thought that wouldn't have been allowed.
- 9 Things like yoghurt, custard, things that we knew would
- 10 boost either -- her lack of eating during the day,
- 11 drinks. Maybe a scone -- instead of her having the rice
- 12 at night which she didn't like, it was made quite in
- 13 advance and it wasn't very appetising -- we would bring
- 14 her in.
- 15 We also brought in tea. We -- she didn't like the
- tea because -- she told the staff initially when she
- 17 went there she didn't like a lot of milk in her tea but
- they would continue to pour in half a cup of milk and then top it up with tea. So she -- then she would lear
- then top it up with tea. So she -- then she would leave it sitting and wouldn't drink it. So we brought in the
- teabags and made the tea in the home and bought it down
- to her and she absolutely took it. That only happened
 - when her own family came in.
 - 24 Q. And was she fond of the tea that you brought in?
 - 25 A. Yes, she was.

- Q. The home that your mother was in closed down fairly
 early, is it right? When the pandemic hit in March --
- 3 A. Yes.

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- 4 Q. -- you were informed that there would be no visits, and5 the home was closed?
- 6 A. It closed on 18 March and I was informed by a phone 7 call, and on that particular day my brother, who lived 8 with my mother, was on his way to the home. He went 9 every day and he would always stop at the local shop and 10 go in and get her, you know, fresh chilled drinks, yoghurts, maybe biscuits. The usual things. And 11 12 bananas, things that he knew that if she didn't eat the 13 tea, he obviously wasn't giving them to her before she 14 had her meals; he was waiting to see had she eaten 15 during the day and then he would give her. And the home 16 rang me while I was collecting grandchildren at our 17 local school, and I said, "But my brother is actually on

Now, this was minutes after the home officially closed to the public, and I said, "But could you let him in just to give in the things that he has bought?" And they said no.

his way and he will be there at any moment" and they

said, "No, you have to phone him and tell him that he

Q. Did they give you much more information than that?

1 your mother was doing?

can't come in."

2 A. No. We didn't get any information, unless we rang 3 different family members. So instead of us all ringing 4 and asking the same questions, myself and my brother, 5 who did live with my mother at home, were the usual two 6 that rang. And then we would ring each other and see, 7 you know, that ... so they basically said, "Your mother 8 is fine, she's sitting in her room" or she's, you know, 9 and at one stage I asked "Is she eating?", and the 10 nurse, her reply was "Well, you know your mother is not 11 a big eater anyway."

And I said, "Yes, but with us coming in, we have helped her, to nourish her with healthy foods, not bringing her in junk or things like that but bringing her in healthy foods, and without us getting into the home we're concerned."

- 17 **Q.** Did they suggest that you could bring some food in for
- 18 her?
- 19 **A**. No

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Q. If you and your siblings weren't ringing the home, wereyou getting any information from them?

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- 22 **A.** No.
- 23 Q. Did you get any policy documents or --
- 24 A. We got no policy documents.
- 25 Q. -- any explanation as to what was going on?

1 A. Not at the time. They just said, "We'll monitor it as

2 it goes along. This hopefully won't last." And

3 I immediately was concerned that if it went on any

4 longer than two or three weeks even at that stage, that

5 my mother would go downhill, because you know your own

6 mother best, and you know what affects her. If she was

7 resilient and outgoing and asking lots of questions,

8 I probably wouldn't have been so doubtful, but knowing

9 her personality and knowing that she wasn't a big eater,

my fear was that without seeing a family member, any

family member, or even just one, that she would

12 deteriorate.

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13 Q. Was that a conversation you had with the home?

14 A. Well, I didn't for the first week or so, because at this

stage we all very blindly thought that we would get back

in. We thought, as time goes on, surely someone will

get in, because I'd never heard of a situation where

a relative couldn't visit someone, ongoing, and no word

of when this -- when they would change things. And

20 initially they didn't say anything about when they

thought it would change, but we didn't hear anything for

22 weeks. We just rang the home.

23 Q. But the home was closed for a while.

24 A. (Witness nodded).

25 **Q.** Did you get much information from the home as to how

A. No, absolutely none. Nothing in writing and nothing by phone.

Q. Did you feel like you really understood how your motherwas doing?

5 A. No, I spent every day wondering how she was doing,

6 because the same response was given: should I phone

7 during the day or should I phone at night? Which of

8 these cases am I going to get more information? And it

9 was virtually the same regardless of whether it was

10 during the day. The staff would change over at

11 8 o'clock and the night staff would say, "Well, I'm only

in so I really can't tell you an awful lot". But surely

there's a passing on of information from the daytime

staff to the nighttime staff? And no, we weren't given

15 any information.

16 Q. And is it right that the home had changed hands during17 this time --

18 **A.** Yes.

19 Q. -- and so you presumed there was also a change of staff,20 but were you told about this, and who new staff were?

21 **A.** No, we weren't told that there was a change of hands.

We -- I received a letter, I received a letter probably

on behalf of the rest of the family, and I actually have

24 the letter here. The letter changed from [redacted] --

25 Q. We don't --

- 1 A. -- sorry, sorry.
- 2 The letter -- the home changed hands and we weren't
- 3 told by the home, I got a letter to state this, and they
- 4 had said in the letter that due to Covid restrictions,
- 5 visitors would not be allowed into the home with the
- 6 exceptions of end-of-life care.
- 7 Q. I think you say in your statement also that with the
- 8 change and with Covid happening, you noticed that there
- 9 were more agency and bank staff; is that right?
- 10 A. Yes, and the only reason I know that, without being in
- the home and without being told that there will be other 11
- staff members, when I rang up, the names that I was 12
- 13 given from the person answering the phone were not the
- 14 names that we knew from when we were in visiting.
- 15 Q. And therefore not the staff that your mother knew
- 16 either?
- 17 A. Yes, that's right.
- 18 And is it right that you were phoning the home every day
- 19 to check on your mother?
- 20 A.
- 21 Q. And you were just always told "She's in her room, she's
- fine"? 22
- 23 A. Yeah.
- 24 Q. One of the other concerns that you had was that her
- 25 chair was in a place in her room which was quite some
- 1 A. Yes, she was, yes.
- 2 Q. You tried to get her to understand that you couldn't,
- 3 and why you couldn't. Did she understand why you
- 4 couldn't come in and see her?
- 5 A. My firm belief is that one hundred per cent she didn't
- 6 understand. She was waving me to come in and I was
- 7 having to shake my head -- because there was a very top
- 8 window open, with all the residents sitting underneath
- 9 it. No member of staff came in and stood with her in
- 10 the room to explain to her that I couldn't come in.
- 11 She wouldn't have understood Covid, but
- 12
- I subsequently gave her a Mother's Day card and wrote on 13 it that there was a bad flu and that I couldn't come in,
- 14 but I was hoping to be in soon and that -- I had to
- 15 leave it like that because I didn't know, and I thought
- 16 it sounded better to say -- I knew she could read the
- card and I knew that it might give her hope if she felt 17
- 18 that "At least someone is going to come in to see me
- 19 soon." So I subsequently gave in the items to the home.
- 20 Q. And was anything suggested in terms of remote calling,
- 21 Facetime, or anything like that, for you to be able to
- 22 keep in touch with your mother?
- 23 A. No, no Facetiming or remote call. One nurse did suggest

- 24 her bringing -- again, a nurse that I had never known or
- 25 heard tell of -- bringing her phone down to my mother,

- 1 distance from the buzzer, which she would have to ring
- 2 if she needed help.
- 3 A. Yes.
- 4 Q. Do you know if that changed at all?
- 5 A. Well, the only reason I know that is because I was in
- 6 the home on an occasion before Covid, and my mother,
- 7 I think maybe she just hadn't been feeling well one day,
- 8 and they had set her out in her armchair. They normally
- 9 would have taken her to the day room and sat with all
- 10 the other residents. And on this particular day she was
- 11 sitting at the chair at the window and the buzzer was on
- 12 the opposite side of the room.
- 13 Now I'm assuming that in some instances a connection 14 can be made to lengthen the buzzer to have it near her,
- 15 but on the occasion that I was there, that wasn't the
- 16 case, and I feared that if she had wanted to call
- 17 a nurse, she had no means of doing so.
- 18 Can I ask you about Mother's Day. It was Sunday the 29? Q.
- 19 A.
- 20 Q. You asked if you could go and see her, and you were
- 21 allowed to see her through her window; is that right?
- 22 A. That's right.
- 23 Q. So they brought her into her sitting room. And is it
- 24 right that your mother was waving at you and trying to
- 25 ask you to come into the room?

- 1 and she suggested that maybe we could maybe Facetime.
- 2 But we felt that my mother's hearing wasn't good enough
- 3 and that seeing us on the phone and not being able to
- 4 hear us, it would have been confusing for her. So we
- 5 didn't do it.
- 6 **Q.** And was there also a suggestion, or was this the same
- 7 occasion that you've just described, where a nurse had
- 8 suggested using an iPad?
- A. Yes, I think one of the staff did suggest using an iPad. 9
- 10 My mother, given her age, was not familiar with
- 11 technology. She would have used the phone quite a bit
- 12 at home, and while she had her hearing aid in she was
- 13 able to hear us quite well on the phone. But we didn't
- 14 get the opportunity to phone her. No one made the
- 15 suggestion, and it just didn't happen.
- 16 **Q.** And you talk in your statement about the terrible impact
- 17 that not having those visits from her family must have
- 18 had on your mother. Can you tell us a little bit about
- 19 that, please.

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- 20 A. Well, I felt she would have felt abandoned. That's the
- 21 only way that I can view it. She would have been used
- 22 to daily visits, during the day and at night, and if she
- 23 needed something she knew that her family were there to
- back up what she maybe felt she couldn't relate to the 25 staff, or in some cases thought the staff were too busy.

She would tell us on a couple of occasions her hearing aid broke down, and my brother took it off, had it fixed, bought it straight back. She would have done without the hearing aid maybe rather than ask someone in the home "Can you fix this for me or can you send this off?"

Without seeing familiar faces like ourselves, she didn't sit generally in large group settings. She went up to bed every day during the day for an hour and got up again and then the staff would put her back to bed at night for us coming in. So we were able to sit in her room one to one.

She was a private person who probably didn't like to speak in front of lots of other people in the room. So we had one to one with her. We sat beside her bed and just chatted away for any length of time. There was no cut-off time to go home, apart from obviously not overstaying past 9 o'clock. And I felt that when I phoned first of all and enquired about her, they said, "Your mother's in her room", I felt, is she in her room every day, sitting?

After a while, she's bound to have had an impact on not seeing familiar faces, and faces of her family.

Q. So you were worried about her day-to-day needs perhaps not being met --

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1 And I gave her the medicine. And she was wearing 2 her uniform. She wasn't wearing a mask, and she had an 3 apron, a plastic apron.

4 Q. You say that, looking back, there was a lady in the care 5 home who had dementia, and you think that perhaps your 6 mother got Covid from her. Is it right that she -- this 7 lady with dementia, she would walk in and out of rooms, be wandering corridors?

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9 A. Yes.

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Q. And your view was that the staff weren't effectively 10 11 able to isolate her?

A. It seemed like they couldn't isolate her, because she 12 13 was constantly walking around, and my mother was 14 a little bit -- "afraid" maybe is the right word. And 15 so I spoke to one of the staff at suppertime one night 16 and expressed that my mother was a little bit concerned.

> The lady wasn't doing any harm, I have to add, but she was wandering in and out. And the person I spoke to said, "Well, you know she has dementia, there's nothing we can do about it."

And that was that.

22 Q. And is it right that that lady passed away a week or two 23 after your mother did?

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24 A.

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25 Q. On 7 April 2020, the home rang to say that they

A. Yes. 1

2 Q. -- because she wasn't one of those people who felt like she could actively ask for it, and you were worried 3 4 about her degree of social contact?

5 A. Yes, she would have -- she would have asked the nurse, 6 who would have been in, maybe working with her in the

7 room, she would have told her if she'd had pain or she

8 would -- but she wouldn't have actively sought them in

9 the home unless they were near her.

10 Q. Yes. There was an occasion at the start of April where 11 you spoke to the home, and you were told that your

12 mother had a cough and you offered to go to the pharmacy

13 and get the prescription and bring it to the home; is

14 that right?

15 A. Yes, that's right.

16 Q. And when you turned up at the home, you were in full 17 PPE?

18 **A**. (No audible answer)

19 Was the nurse who took the items from you in full PPE?

20 A. No, the nurse came to the door and she was one of the 21 nurses who had been there for quite -- she had been

22 there certainly from when my mother went there, she came

23 to the door and opened it and her first words were "You

24 can't come in."

25 And I said, "No, I know that."

1 suspected that your mother may have Covid; is that 2 right?

3 A. Yes, they rang to say that my mother felt clammy and had 4 a little bit of a cough.

5 Q. They said that they were going to isolate her in her 6 room?

7 A. Yes, that's right.

8 Q. And when you asked whether that meant that staff would still go in and out, they said "yes". 9

A. Yes, they said the staff would go in and out but they 10 11 wouldn't be fully gowned.

So they said they would be wearing aprons and gloves, is 12 that right, but not be fully covered up in PPE? 13

14 Α.

15 Q. Did they give you an explanation as to why they weren't 16 going --

17 A. No.

18 Q. -- to be wearing full PPE?

A. No. I'm assuming at that stage they didn't have PPE. 19

20 Q. And then a day or two later, they confirmed that your 21 mother did in fact have Covid.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. A critical care team arrived, and they had her on

24 oxygen. You spoke to the doctor; is that right?

25 A. Yes, the doctor rang me from the home, and that was the

first indication that I knew that when the result came back that my mother indeed had Covid, and they said her oxygen levels were falling, and they would, I think it was called the critical care team, they would administer oxygen when needed and that they would come back to the home the following day, and I said at this point "Can I get in to see my mother? Can any of her children get in?"

And she said, "Well, the home are saying no, but I will go and ask." And she did go and ask, and returned and said, "You -- just her immediate family can come to the home in the evening time", not that evening, but two evenings later, "and you can go outside into the courtyard and see your mother through the window."

- 15 Q. And is it right that the seven of you took it in turns16 to go up to the window and --
- 17 A. Yes

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- 18 Q. -- and see your mother? And what was your mother's19 response on seeing you?
- A. Well, my mother -- we were shocked, but my mother was wheeled over to near the window, a member of staff was fully covered in PPE in the room, and my mother's bed was taken from that side of the room to the side where the window was and she had an oxygen mask on her, and the first person that went in, whichever one of my

the home one day to see had the acute care team returned to see how she was, and the person who answered the phone, the nursing person, said, "No, we can do that ourselves."

And I said, "No, well, it's just that the acute care team informed me that they would return to the home, and they would subsequently let me know how she was doing with her oxygen levels, how she looked, if in their opinion she was in danger."

And they said, "Oh, no, no, we can do that."

- 11 Q. And is it right that you asked the home to let you know12 if things went downhill?
- 13 **A.** Yes.
- 14 Q. And you received a phone call early on Easter Sunday,15 which was 12 April --
- 16 **A.** Yes.
- 17 Q. -- to say that your mother had passed away?
- A. Yes. I had rang the home the previous night, on the
 Saturday night. Different members of my family had rang
 throughout Saturday, and everyone was told she's
 sleeping, she's okay, she's sleeping, she's a little bit
 clammy.

But as the day staff were about to change their shift, I rang before they changed their shift, and I said, "I would like to see my mother but I also want

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1 siblings first went in, from that until the last one

went in, she smiled at each one and told the nurse theirname.

- 4 **Q.** And is it right that that was the last time you saw your mother?
- 6 A. Yes.
- Q. After that, you carried on ringing to see how she wasdoing.
- 9 A. I enquired again could I go in, and they said "no". And
 10 I said, "Look, if I can get PPE myself, can I go in and
 11 go out to the courtyard and see her through the window
 12 as we previously had done?"
- 13 And they said, "No, there's no visits allowed."
- 14 Q. Did they say why you couldn't see her from the15 courtyard?
- A. Didn't give a reason but I think they were still using
 the, "It's the Public Health, it's not us" argument.
- 18 **Q.** Was there any discussion with you or your siblings about
- palliative care or end-of-life care?
 A. No, there was no discussion from -- well, yes, when we
- 21 heard that she had Covid, I suppose we were just like 22 everyone else. You hope that she will recover from it.
- 23 And as days went on, she stayed much the same. She
- 24 didn't go downhill in a matter of a couple of days. She
- 25 rallied for a bit with low oxygen levels and then I rang
- to be informed about how she is. I want to know if
 she's getting worse, and I don't mind at what time of
 the night someone rings me, but I will be available, and
 I would like to be able to come up to the home and see
 her."
- 6 Q. And --
- 7 **A.** And she assured me that there would be two members of staff on that night, and that I could ring them any time 9 I wanted.
- 10 Q. But you didn't receive a call until --
- 11 A. No, I didn't --
- 12 **Q**. -- the one --
- 13 A. -- receive any call --
- 14 Q. -- saying that she had died?
- 15 A. I rang -- the latest that I felt I wanted to ring was
 about 11 pm, and they said, "Oh your mother is sleeping,
- she's the same as she was earlier on. She's not eating,
- 18 she's just taking sips of water."
- And I suppose because I heard that she was only taking sips of water, I just made the assumption that she's not very well. But no one told me that.
- Q. And when you received the call saying that she had
 passed, you asked whether anyone had been with her --
- 24 **A.** Yes.
- 25 Q. -- when she died?

- 1 A. Yes.
- 2 Q. Had anyone been with her?
- 3 A. The nurse said no.
- 4 $\,$ **Q.** You asked if you could bring some clothes in for your
- 5 mother after that?
- 6 A. Yes.
- 7 Q. Were you able to do so?
- 8 A. No. We were told we weren't allowed to bring in any
- 9 clothes, and that we weren't able to come up to the home
- at any time of the day, and that they wouldn't be doing
- 11 anything until the doctor had confirmed the death. So
- 12 we just then subsequently contacted the funeral
- 13 director.
- 14 Q. And you give a very vivid description in your statement
- 15 of going to the home.
- 16 A. (Witness nodded)
- 17 Q. Not really understanding what was going on.
- 18 A. Yeah.

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- 19 $\,$ **Q.** Not being given any information. And then the
- 20 undertaker coming, spending some time in the home and
- 21 then taking your mother away --
- 22 A. (Witness nodded)
- 23 Q. -- leaving all of you just standing there?
- 24 A. (Witness nodded)
- 25 Q. The funeral took place the next day; is that right?

allowed -- we were only allowed to have ten people, no grandchildren, no one else at the church. The priest said "You can only come over and stand."

The immediate family have to stand spaced out around the grave. We did that. And no one else was present.

So, yes, there were just a few prayers said, and my mother's coffin was lowered into the ground.

And then we went home to our own houses. And subsequently, I think the next day or two days later, the graveyards were closed.

Now, in Ireland and in Northern Ireland, funerals are different, and I believe they are different to what they are in England insofar as we have what's called a three-day wake. We have the day that the person's remains come home from a hospital or a nursing home. We have the next day where people call to offer support, to speak about the person who has passed away. And in our case my mother had a very long life, so a lot of people would have had stories to tell. Her grandchildren would have loved to have compared stories. They still do.

So, yes, we were denied the opportunity of doing that, of meeting up. Neighbours couldn't come to the funeral and they couldn't come to her house.

And I can sum it up, if I was trying to think of what my mother would have made of it, she would have

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- 1 A. Yes, just going back to -- the undertaker did go to the
- 2 home, and he had to wait around for quite some time
- 3 before he was admitted inside. When he got in
 - himself -- and two other people who I believe he had to
- 5 take with him to get my mother ready, if "ready" is the
- 6 right word -- and we expected to be called in when they
- 7 had done that. We expected to be called into the home
- 8 to see our mother for the last time, and to say our
- 9 goodbyes, but after --
- 10 Q. Were you allowed to do that?
- 11 A. No, we weren't allowed to do that.
- 12 Q. Thank you. And you attended the funeral the next day,
- and you said in your statement that there was no wake,
- that you were all outside, just the children, spaced
- 15 out?
- 16 A. Yes.
- 17 **Q.** And then she was taken to the church graveyard and
- 18 wheeled in her coffin there. There was no mass --
- 19 **A.** No
- 20 Q. -- no service, just prayers, with only ten of you
- 21 allowed at the graveyard?
- 22 A. That's right.
- 23 Q. And afterwards you all had to go home to your own
- 24 houses?

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25 **A.** That's right, yes. We obeyed the rules. We weren't

been absolutely shocked to think that in her dying days and moments she never saw a family member. She was totally reliant on the limited number of staff that were

there. And try as I might, I can't imagine what went through her mind.

Thank you. And is it right that you went to the home a few weeks later to collect her belongings?

- 8 A. Yes
- 9 Q. And you had some concerns about the degree to which IPC
- measures were adopted in the home and an example you
- 11 give is that when you went to the home to collect her
- belongings, there were delivery people and workmen going
- in and out of the home without any PPE on; is that
- 14 right?
- 15 A. Yes. Well, I had to ring the home myself to ask could
- 16 I come up and collect my mother's belongings? I didn't
- get a phone call about that. And they said, "We have to
- 18 keep them here between a week and six weeks. That's the
- 19 rules for Covid."
- 20 **Q**. And you --
- 21 A. And I said, "That's fine." I'm sorry.
- Q. I'm sorry to interrupt. You also mention that the homewas short staffed even before the pandemic?
- 24 **A.** Yes.
- 25 Q. And you can imagine that it only would have got worse

1 during the	e pandemic.
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2 A. Yes, that's true.

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- 3 Q. And is it right that you also don't think that the home 4 had much PPE?
- 5 A. Well, they didn't have any PPE until after my mother 6 died. A local group were able to ask for funding, and 7 the local group went round five or six nursing homes in 8 the general area of where my mother was in the city of 9 Armagh itself, they went round and gave out PPE.

Staffing, from the day and hour my mother went in, was an issue. Lack of. During the day it wasn't too bad, but from 8 o'clock at night until morning time, there were times when there was one assistant, and on a night when we could breathe a sigh of relief going through the door, there were two care assistants, and what it meant when my mother needed the toilet, it became an issue to the extent that we almost -- our blood pressure and our anxiety levels rose as we went through the door, because we knew as soon as we got in. our mother would ask us "I need to go to the toilet", we couldn't find -- and she was in bed at this stage, so she needed an assistant or a nurse to get her up and help her out.

We spoke to the manager about it. We spoke to the social worker about it. The social worker at first

1 the inspections not carried out? Why was someone not 2 going into the home and saying, "You need to do this"? 3 The RQIA weren't in, the Public Health Authority weren't

4 in, I don't know if my mother's room was cleaned.

5 I don't know anything about what happened from 18 March 6

until 12 April.

7 Q. Thank you. We've covered quite a lot but is there anything in particular that you would like to say? 8

9 A. No, I think we've covered most of the issues.

MS JUNG: Thank you. 10

11 Thank you very much for coming to assist the 12 Inquiry.

13 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you very much indeed for your help.

14 I don't know -- I can't remember if you were at the 15 meeting when I first went to Northern Ireland to consult 16 about the terms of reference.

17 THE WITNESS: I don't think I was.

LADY HALLETT: But one of the very first things I learned 18 19 from going around the country from bereaved family 20 members was how different bereavement is during the time 21 of the pandemic, and you're talking then about the 22 three-day wake that you would normally have. I mean, as 23 I understand it, the three-day wake, the idea is that 24 you get your grief out.

25 A. Yes.

1 couldn't believe that I was telling her there was one

2 assistant at night, and I don't know if anything

3 changed, but it certainly couldn't have changed for the 4 hetter

Q. Thank you. And just finally, obviously the home was 5 6 having to follow guidance and was struggling with 7 workforce, staff numbers, and things like that, but do 8 you think that the home did enough to care for your mother and to take into consideration your family's

9 10 needs?

11 A. Well, if they were to say they were following 12 guidelines, I don't understand any guideline that keeps 13 a family member out from a dying parent in their last 14 hours. If they didn't get in during Covid, that was bad 15 enough, but end-of-life care, to me, is a human right.

16 It's a right to be able to see your parent, siblings,

17 whoever would be in a nursing home, and given the 18 context of where my mother was placed in the home, 19 I never needed to go near another resident. I could 20 have gone in, round the back, in through the courtyard,

21 and my mother's room was facing out, which is the place

22 we went to see her when they told us she had Covid. 23

So why keep people out? We're not going in to have parties; we're not going in to have fun. We're going in to see our dying relative. Why keep them out? Why were

1 LADY HALLETT: That you share the joy of the person's life 2 and that you do it as group of loving family and

3 friends

24

25

4 A. That's right, Lady Hallett. Yes, that's right.

5 LADY HALLETT: Well, I very much understood that point that 6 people wished to make and I'm really grateful to you for

7 your help. I appreciate it can't have been easy.

8 THE WITNESS: No.

LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed. 9

THE WITNESS: Thank you, Lady Hallett. Thank you. 10

11 And thank you.

LADY HALLETT: Right, we will sit later before lunch to try 12 to finish the next witness before we break. 13

14 MS CECIL: I'm grateful, I'll just pause for a moment, 15

16 Thank you. If may call Helen Hough, who is just 17 making her way in now.

LADY HALLETT: Don't trip over the step. 18

THE WITNESS: I'm recovering from a broken leg. 19

20 LADY HALLETT: Oh, no --

21 THE WITNESS: I've got a broken foot and a broken knee, but

22 we're fine.

23 LADY HALLETT: Are you okay to stand to take the oath?

24 THE WITNESS: Yes. 25 LADY HALLETT: Right.

MS HELEN HOUGH (sworn) 1 2 LADY HALLETT: I'm sorry you're the last witness of the 3 morning, but I promise you, we'll sit on into the lunch 4 hour so that you can complete your evidence before we 5 break 6 THE WITNESS: Okay, thank you. 7 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much for waiting. THE WITNESS: Thank you. 8 9 **Questions from COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY** 10 MS CECIL: Thank you, Ms Hough. You've helpfully provided a witness statement to the 11 Inquiry. For those following, that's INQ000587639. But 12 13 you are here today to speak about your experiences of 14 the pandemic in owning and managing a care home and your 15 personal experiences involving your husband, Vernon; is 16 that right? 17 A. I am, thank you. Q. At the time the pandemic began, in January of 2020, you 18 19 and your husband owned a nursing home in Wrexham; is 20 that the position? A. Yes. 21 Q. You have a background in nursing yourself? 22 23 A. Yes. Q. In fact you come from a family tradition of nurses --24 25 Α. We do -- I do. 97 1 do a few shifts. But over time I took on more staff 2 because the home became more, for want of a better word, 3 bureaucratic. So there was a lot more paperwork to be 4 done as an owner/manager as there was in previous years. 5 So I went down to about three shifts a week, and the 6 rest of the time was in the office. 7 Just to get a sense of the size of the home in terms of 8 staffing, you had 12 trained nursing staff members? 9 A. Yes. You had 35 carers? 10 Q. Δ Yes 11 Which would increase up to 45 during holiday periods? 12 Q. 13 Α. Yes. Five domestic staff?

An administrator to help you with your duties --

Q. -- your mum, your sister and you? 1 2 A. Yes. Q. You purchased the property that was to become the 3 4 nursing home back in 1987, and over time that grew in 5 6 A. Yes. 7 Q. It began with 22 residents and subsequently up to 40. 8 A. 9 Q. And there was a nursery as well in the grounds at one 10 stage? 11 Yes. A. 12 Q. Your sister ran that? 13 She did. Q. It was a family affair, effectively. 14 (Witness nodded) 15 16 Q. You and your family have always lived on site? 17 A. 18 So it was both your home but also your business? Q. 19 Α. Yes. 20 Q. You worked within the home initially as well, doing far more nursing; is that the position? 21 22 Α. 23 Q. Then over time what happened? 24 A. So I -- when we first opened I was there full time. My 25 sister helped out working night shift and my mum would 1 Q. -- in terms of management? 2 Yes. 3 Q. And then also your husband Vernon took on a full-time 4 role within the home too? 5 Α.

6 Q. He undertook maintenance but also a lot of care in 7 relation to the residents --

A. He did. Q. -- in terms of doing different chores and different 9 things -- (overspeaking) --10

A. Entertaining patients, yes. 11

So that's really the position as at the start of the 12 13 pandemic --

14 Α. Yes

8

Q. -- in terms of the home. 15

Just touching on how you viewed those patients and 16 17 residents within the home, what would it you -- how would you describe them? To you? 18

Well, we were a nursing home, so we had very poorly 19 20 patients. So on our ground floor, it was -- we had 21 quite poorly patients. So it was a bit like very 22 intensive nursing. Upstairs, there were less intensive

23 nursing. And we did have a few patients that were

24 classed as residential patients. In other words,

25 they could self care but they were mainly there as 100

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14 Q.

15 Α. Yes.

16 Q.

17 Α. Yes

18 Q.

19 A. Yes.

20 Q.

22 Q.

23 A. Yes.

24 Q.

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Two activity coordinators --

-- for the residents?

Five kitchen staff?

Yes.

Α.

Α. Yes.

Two maintenance staff?

a partner to somebody who'd, say, had a severe stroke and their husband's -- came in with them, or they came in because they were quite local and they wanted to come to us

I didn't have many residential patients; they were mainly -- I mean, residential -- classed as residential, but they -- we categorised them all as patients, but some, about four or five, were self caring. The rest were all quite heavy nursing patients.

In terms of Vernon's role in relation to your patients,

And they were just like our extended family, really.

can you just give an insight into what he would do? A. His role -- before the pandemic, his role was -- he did all the general maintenance there and he did the decorating and painted. The gardens in particular. His father used to do the gardens when he was alive as well. And then he'd go out and do all the shopping for the care. We had deliveries but there were other things that we would get in here, there and everywhere for -specialised things that patients wanted.

But he would also see to them having the patients have their newspapers. And if they wanted anything in particular, if they fancied fish and chips, he'd go and get it. But he was -- he did a lot of running around outside of the home as well as the maintenance inside 101

which at the time, they were saying that it was like a bird flu and it wasn't pass-able to humans, which is the first time they said that as well.

So we were aware that something was going on in China back really in November of 1919 -- not 1919, 2019. And I became aware of -- I was starting to pick up articles about this, because I was a bit concerned that it was going to start coming across to Britain at some point. But we were still -- we weren't fully aware of it coming to us, really, until about the February of 2020, and we were away at the time, and my son was going skiing and he was concerned that he wasn't going to get back to Britain, because Italy and Spain and places had already began to lock down. China had already locked down by this time.

- Q. If I can just pause you there really, just to come back 16 17 to the home itself.
- Yes. 18 Α.

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- Q. It was at that point that you describe that you began --19
- 20 A. I began getting --
- Q. -- stockpiling your own PPE. 21
- 22 A. I began stockpiling then PPE. In the February,
- 23 I thought, well, we're going to start with another
- 24 pandemic here.
- 25 Q. And it's right to say that you've had some experience --103

the home 1

2 Q. And I understand in relation to your patients within the 3 home, you'd also take them out on day trips and things 4 like that when possible?

A. Yes. So we -- he would take them up to the garden, to 5 6 the polytunnel where they would do lots of planting with

7 the patients. Those who were interested in gardening.

8 But if we arranged day trips we often arranged, like,

9 trips on the canal in Llangollen and things, and then he

10 would take them in the van and he would accompany the

11 carers who had taken the patients to bring them back and

12 arrange, to ferry people back in, too. He would also

13 pick up day patients from their home and bring them back

in. And occasionally he would take the odd patient up 15

to the pub next door in a wheelchair, if they fancied

16 a drink in the pub, or wherever, but we were there all

17 the time.

14

18 Q. Indeed.

19 I'm now going to turn, if I may, to the outset of 20 the pandemic and you explain within your witness 21 statement that you start to become aware of what is 22 going on in China initially.

23 A. Yes, I read, I was working a night shift and I was 24 reading on my phone from The Lancet that there was 25 a possible SARS outbreak again in China, coming our way,

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. -- in terms of infection control measures previously in

3 relation to other outbreaks --

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. -- whether it's norovirus, seasonal flu, for example,

6 which is obviously -- (overspeaking) --

7 A. And swine flu a few years before, yeah.

8 Q. And swine flu.

9 A. Yeah.

Q. Now, in terms of official guidance and contact with 10

11 local authorities and other organisations, in that

12 respect you had a meeting, do you recall, on 10 March?

13 A. I do.

14 Q. So not long after, you became more aware of it in late 15 February --

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. -- and there was a meeting between you, the local

18 authority, other care home providers --

Yes 19 Α.

20 Q. -- and GP cluster leads?

21 Α.

22 Q. So effectively a health and adult social care meeting.

23 And in relation to that meeting that covered broad

24 issues; is that right --

25 A. Yes.

- 1 Q. -- in relation to recognising potential symptoms of
- 2 Covid-19?
- 3 A. Yes.
- 4 Q. And reducing any cross infection, managing any potential
- 5 outbreak within the home, and infection and prevention
- 6 control.
- 7 And I just want to bring up, if I may, paragraph 19
- 8 of your witness statement.
- 9 **A.** Yes
- 10 Q. Because within your statement you set out that you made
- 11 a note at the time --
- 12 A. Yes.
- 13 Q. -- of upsetting messages, as you described them, that
- 14 you heard at that meeting. And I just want to go
- 15 through them if I may, with you briefly now.
- This is what you came away with: that, firstly,
- 17 older people would not be ventilated?
- 18 A. No.
- 19 Q. Was that said in the meeting?
- 20 A. Yes. It was that older people would not be considered
- 21 for ventilation, was their terms, yeah.
- 22 Q. But second, and indeed you go on, and it goes on then to
- 23 specify:
- 24 "The care home population will not be considered for
- 25 ventilation ..."

- 1 Q. -- or telephone consultations?
- 2 A. Yes. Which unfortunately wasn't good in my care home
- 3 because of the wi-fi coverage. It was quite poor.
- 4 Q. We're going to come on to that later in a little bit
- 5 more detail, but essentially these were the messages
- 6 that were being sent right at the outset of the
- 7 pandemic --
- 8 A. Yes.
- 9 Q. -- to you as a care home manager?
- 10 A. Yeah.
- 11 Q. Now, around this time also, there were policies being
- 12 instituted in relation to the discharge of patients from
- 13 hospitals into care homes?
- 14 A. Yeah.
- 15 Q. And you set out within your statement your experiences
- in that regard?
- 17 **A**. Yes
- 18 Q. Now, you say that was not something that was unusual in
- 19 and of itself?
- 20 **A**. No
- 21 $\,$ Q. In that there were obviously established procedures in
- 22 place for the discharge of hospital residents into your

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- care home and had been for many years?
- 24 **A.** Yes
- 25 Q. It was effectively a regular occurrence?

1 A. Yeah.

- 2 Q. And is this your note here, "in fact there were
- 3 virtually no admissions from care homes into hospitals
- 4 at all"?
- 5 A. Afterwards, yeah.
- 6 Q. That's after that point?
- 7 A. Yeah.
- 8 Q. That your experience of it -- (overspeaking) --
- 9 pandemic?
- 10 **A.** Yeah.
- 11 Q. And that then, in terms of access to medical care:
- 12 "One GP will be allocated per care home" --
- 13 A. Yes.
- 14 Q. -- "with most consultations conducted over the
- 15 [telephone] ..."
- 16 A. Yeah.
- 17 Q. And indeed, in -- your experience was that, following on
- from that, no general practitioner attended the care
- 19 home --
- 20 A. From 23 March --
- 21 Q. -- in person? Until well into 2021?
- 22 A. Yeah
- 23 Q. So it follows from that that there were remote or
- 24 video --
- 25 **A.** Yes.

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- 1 A. Yes.
- 2 Q. If you had a bed -- and you'd be in contact with that
- 3 hospital -- (overspeaking) --
- 4 A. It was weekly.
- 5 Q. Exactly, to see if you had any bed space available?
- 6 A. Yeah
- 7 Q. So from around early March, again, you were contacted
- 8 then about potential free bed spaces --
- 9 **A.** Yeah.
- 10 Q. -- which would enable individuals to be discharged from
- 11 hospital and free up the hospitals beds.
- 12 In that regard, there was no mandatory or routine
- 13 testing at that stage. What was your response?
- 14 A. My response was to the local health board, was the only
- 15 way I would accept any patients from the hospital would
- be if they came with a written negative Covid swab. And
- 17 I wanted it in writing that it was -- it had come as
- 18 a negative Covid swab.
- 19 And the response I got was that that may not be
 - 20 possible to do that, and I said, "Well, they don't
 - 21 come."
- 22 And their response was that they were going to
- 23 report me to CIW for bed blocking.
- 24 Q. Were you reported?
- 25 A. I don't know. I said, "You can report me to who you

- want, but nobody is setting foot over my nursing homewithout a negative Covid swab."
- 3 And they didn't.
- 4 Q. And did that remain the position?
- 5 A. The whole time.
- 6 Q. And so, in terms of the first patients from hospitals
- 7 that would have been accepted into your care home, when
- 8 roughly would that have been? Can you recall?
- 9 A. When was what, sorry?
- 10 Q. -- (overspeaking) -- with a negative test?
- 11 A. Oh, that happened quite soon afterwards, the -- when we
- 12 got patients coming in from there. I would say
- probably, again, March time, when we were first having
- patients coming in. Quite poorly patients by this time.
- They were having negative swabs. It was written down
- 16 that they were -- tested negative for Covid before they
- 17 came to me.
- 18 Q. And was that before the rollout across Wales of the
- 19 mandatory testing prior to hospital discharge; do you
- 20 know?
- 21 A. I don't know. I don't know if it was before then. It
- 22 probably was, because it was quite early on that -- as
- 23 soon as we knew -- I've got a friend who works in
- 24 a hospital, and so we were saying -- you know, she was
- on a ward where she was treating patients with Covid, so
- 1 prevention and control guidance. That was also
- 2 something that was touched on at that 10 March meeting.
- 3 A. Yeah.
- 4 Q. But just dealing with how that guidance developed and,
- 5 firstly, how realistic it was. Part -- aspects of it
- 6 were social distancing, as you set out.
- 7 A. Yes.
- 8 Q. You were advised that you had to remain 2 metres apart.
- 9 A. Yes.
- 10 Q. Was that realistic in your care home, in your nursing
- 11 home?
- 12 A. No. No, it's impossible. To begin with, you can't move
- anybody on your own. You can't nurse a patient without
- 14 touching them. But also, you need two carers. If you
- 15 are moving a patient safely, you need at least two
- 16 carers with every patient to be able to move them. And
- 17 they're going to be less than 2 metres apart.
- I mean, we were advised at one time that theirrecreational room, which was outside, their chairs
- should be situated 2 metres apart outside. And then,
- when they came in the home, they're in the same room,
- 22 handling the same patient. The guidance was -- it was
- 23 nonsensical, really.
- ${\bf 24}~{\bf Q}.~{\bf And}$ you explain that much of the IPC measures that were
- 25 put in place within your nursing home was a consequence, 111

- 1 I knew that I didn't want anybody from hospital that
- 2 tested positive with Covid.
- 3 Q. And in your statement you say that you were concerned --
- 4 A. Yeah.
- 5 Q. -- about the pressure being applied --
- 6 **A.** I was
- 7 Q. -- on both you and other care homes?
- 8 A. Yeah
- 9 Q. What enabled you to say no?
- 10 A. Because I was an owner. I was an owner and a manager.
- 11 And I did say to public -- to the local health board,
- 12 "I hope you're not putting pressure on other homes like
- 13 you are with me, on managers, because managers may not
- be able to say 'no we're not going to take people
- with -- or we're not going to take people, only with
- 16 a negative swab'."
- 17 If you've got a homeowner that's got eight empty
- 18 beds, then the owner may say "We want them filled"
- regardless, whereas I had the choice to say, "no they're
- 20 not coming into my home."
- 21 I'm not sure that every manager had that choice.
- 22 I don't know, but I did say that to public health -- to
- 23 the local health board, that I hoped they weren't
- 24 putting that pressure on them.
- 25 Q. Now, I want to turn now to the subject of infection

- 1 effectively, of your previous experience --
- 2 A. Yes.
- 3 Q. -- and training --
- 4 A. Yes.
- 5 Q. -- in relation to infection control?
- 6 A. Yes

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- 7 Q. Just picking up on one of the practical consequences of
 - that within the home, you split the nursing home into
- 9 three separate sections --
- 10 A. Yeah.
- 11 Q. -- and areas; is that right?
- 12 **A.** Yes, three zones.
- 13 Q. And you had a red zone?
- 14 A. Yeah.
- 15 Q. And a green zone?
- 16 A. Yeah.
- 17 Q. Or they were designated red and green?
- 18 **A**. Yes
- 19 **Q.** Red zones were where people with any symptoms of Covid
- or suspected Covid were moved to?
- 21 **A.** Yes
- 22 Q. And then the green zones were obviously business as
- 23 normal, effectively, within the care home?
- 24 **A**. Yes
- 25 Q. In terms of the staffing of those areas, were there

1 designated staff that would only work in the red 2 zones --3 A. Yes. 4 Q. -- and only work in the green zones? 5 A. Yes 6 Q. And I understand it was only you and Vernon that would 7 cross between them? 8 Α. 9 Q. And that was because you had the capacity to change your 10 clothes effectively --Yes. 11 Α. 12 Q. -- and shower and take those precautions. 13 With regard to the red zone, after a patient was moved out of a room and into the red zone, what did you 14 do with their room? 15 16 A. Their room, if they -- I mean, we didn't have testing 17 then, so if they had symptoms -- during Covid, while -when we did have testing, if they were in that area, 18 19 then they would -- you know, they didn't always pass 20 away with Covid. So some patients didn't. But before 21 we had the testing, if they developed any sort of 22 symptoms of what we thought were Covid then they stayed 23 in that red zone until those symptoms were well and 24 truly past. And that could be for up to a month. 25 But I did have poorly patients obviously that died 1 When we decided that it was safer to keep them in their 2 individual rooms, it took a lot more staff to be able to 3 take their feeds in there, to feed certain patients, to 4 take their food. So it had to be done -- once you'd 5 moved from one area then sometimes we'd have to take 6 some staff off there to go to another area to do all the 7 feeds. You could be doing 12 to 15 feeds for patients 8 who couldn't feed themselves. So it took a lot more 9 staff rather than being in a communal dining room. 10 So staffing wise it posed a massive problem. Indeed, and we're going to come on to the staffing 11 Q. difficulties that you experienced in due course. 12 13 Α. 14 Q. But just turning, then, to staff and their facilities, I understand you also had a dirty changing room? 15 16 A. Yes. 17 Q. For them to be able to change in and out of their 18 19 Α.

And then their clothes would be laundered at the nursing

In terms of ventilation, within the -- within your

nursing home, you explain that the nature of the

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20 Q.

21 22 **A**.

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24

25

Q.

home --

-- so they would remain there.

Yes.

in that red zone. 1 2 My problem was that patients soon became aware of 3 this area, and they didn't really want to move their own 4 bedrooms. It's their home. They didn't want to move to that area because they also realised patients weren't 5 6 coming from that area. So they were a bit reluctant to 7 move into that zone. 8 Q. And you explain that became particularly difficult --9 Yeah. A. 10 Q. -- after testing was instituted and people were 11 asymptomatic? 12 Exactly. A. 13 -- (overspeaking) -- presenting with no symptoms? Q. A. Exactly. Because we realised after testing that we 14 could have had -- potentially had patients in the green 15 16 zone that were Covid positive. 17 Q. And in terms of isolating them in their own rooms, did 18 that pose practical challenges? 19 A. Definitely. 20 Q. What were those, just -- (overspeaking) --21 A. Because everything -- where the patients were in 22 communal areas you needed less staff to observe what the 23 patients were doing. Most patients are encouraged to 24 get up most days. There are obviously poorly patients 25 that couldn't but most patients were in communal rooms. 114 1 building posed its own challenges in that regard. 2 Δ Yeah. 3 Q. In the first wave, it was relatively straightforward 4 because you could have the windows open --5 A. That's right. 6 Q. -- and doors open, it was spring, summer. But as it got 7 to winter, was that possible? A. We did ventilate the rooms as best we could, but no, you 8 9 can't have the windows wide open when it's very cold 10 11 So it was very difficult to ventilate rooms. 12 Once a patient had left a room, we could 13 14 had left the room, but while they were in, ventilation 15

outside because of the risk of them getting hypothermia.

deep-cleanse the room and ventilate it when the patient

Q. I really want to just ask you about access to suitable 16 17 personal protective equipment --

18 Α.

19 Q. -- PPE, as we've been referring to it, for both the 20 staff that you employed and also your residents. You 21 explain that at the beginning you began to stockpile it.

22 **A**. Yes.

23 Q. You ordinarily have some --

24 A.

25 Q. -- but not significant quantities.

- 1 A. No.
- 2 Q. Is it right that within the nursing home itself, you got
- 3 through a huge amount of PPE because of the nature of
- 4 the services that you were providing?
- 5 A. Yes.
- 6 Q. In terms of your carers, they were all trained by the
- 7 nursing staff --
- 8 A. Yes.
- 9 Q. -- and you in relation to how to --
- 10 A. Yes.
- 11 Q. -- how to use that PPE appropriately and correctly?
- 12 **A.** Yes.
- 13 Q. With regard to supplies, you encountered difficulties
- 14 yourself from your ordinary suppliers; is that right?
- 15 **A.** I did.
- 16 Q. And what happened there?
- 17 A. They -- when we -- after the lockdown, they told us that
- they couldn't supply to us anymore because they were
- 19 only supplying Public Health England. And they did --
- 20 fortunately, I knew the owner of the company because
- 21 when he was first setting up in business he came to me
- 22 personally and I supported his business throughout, and
- 23 I spoke to him directly, and he did agree to send us
- 24 PPE, but he said, "But I can't do this for other homes."
- 25 I don't know what happened in other homes but that's how
- 1 **A.** Yes.
- 2 Q. And the Inquiry has heard already in earlier modules
- 3 and, indeed, from experts, in relation to the fit not
- 4 always being appropriate --
- 5 **A.** No.
- 6 Q. -- for the workforce?
- 7 A. Yeah.
- 8 Q. Did you find that those goggles were, similarly, not fit
- 9 for purpose in relation to your female staff?
- 10 A. Yes. The first lot of goggles we were given, they were
- in a box. There were 600 pairs and they didn't fit the
- 12 staff at all. So Vernon drilled every set of goggles,
- so we could thread elastic through them at the back to
- 14 keep them tight to their eyes, and fit their head. So
- 15 we drilled every single one of them. And then it was
- either a month or six weeks later we were told that they
- were inappropriate, they didn't work, so we were to
- throw them all away.
- 19 **Q.** And then you also, separately to that, had visors made
- 20 by a local factory?
- 21 A. A local factory made us visors, yes.
- 22 $\,$ Q. In terms of costs, you touch on this in your statement.
- 23 You explain that the cost of PPE effectively
- 24 skyrocketed?
- 25 A. Absolutely, yes. A box of gloves went from being

- 1 I got mine. Only by knowing the owner of the company.
- 2 Q. And even with that supply, you were still significantly
- 3 short?
- 4 A. Oh, I bought a lot of things off Amazon.
- 5 Q. Yes, Amazon and DIY shops?
- 6 A. Yes.
- 7 Q. And local DIY stores. You were also assisted by the
- 8 local community, as I understand it --
- 9 **A.** Yes
- 10 Q. -- in terms of them making thicker gowns, masks?
- 11 A. Yes.
- 12 Q. Theatre gowns, effectively --
- 13 A. Yes.
- 14 Q. -- (overspeaking) -- coverings --
- 15 A. Yes.
- 16 Q. -- and other aspects that you sought and they had
- 17 gratefully supplied?
- 18 A. Yes, our -- the village -- the people who were from the
- 19 village, and also carers' relatives made us full masks
- with a filter in between them, and the operation gowns
- 21 from duvet covers that -- old duvet covers that I
- 22 supplied. Yeah.
- 23 Q. You explain that in terms of the local authority, they
- 24 provided the some surgical masks, plastic aprons and
- 25 gloves, but also on one occasion provided goggles.
 - 11
- 1 a pound for a hundred to being ten pounds, or more.
- 2 Q. Thank you.
- 3 I'm dealing now, if I may, with testing for your
- 4 staff and for your residents. Again, you were given
- 5 details of testing arrangements initially on that
- 6 10 March meeting?
- 7 A. Yeah.
- 8 Q. That it would be managed by Public Health Wales on
- 9 a telephone booking appointment system?
- 10 A. (Witness nodded)
- 11 Q. And that, in terms of that, you were having to send your
- 12 staff to testing centres initially --
- 13 A. (Witness nodded)
- 14 Q. -- but soon after that, tests were withdrawn --
- 15 A. Yes.
- 16 Q. -- because they were being prioritised at the time,
- 17 effectively, for the hospitals?
- 18 A. Well, I didn't -- we didn't know why they were closed
- 19 down. So we had drive through testing centres quite
- 20 local to us, and then all of a sudden they closed. So
- 21 we were having to send staff who were symptomatic to
- test centres, because they would only test people who
- 23 were symptomatic. One member -- they were having to go
- 24 into England, and one member of staff drove to
- 25 Manchester Airport to get tested because there were no

- 1 test facilities in Wales. And if you looked for it
- 2 online where you could get a test, it would say every
- 3 single day "no tests available".
- 4 Q. I want to just deal, if I may, with a very practical
- 5 difficulty that arose in relation to your patients --
- 6 A. Yeah.
- 7 Q. -- when you had considered that they needed a test, you
- 8 explained the process as was set out by Public Health
- 9 Wales that you'd contact the GP --
- 10 A. Yes.
- 11 Q. -- to arrange that and then that in due course a testing
- 12 kit and swab would be brought to you.
- 13 A. Yeah.
- 14 Q. But that typically took 48 hours --
- 15 A. Yeah.
- 16 Q. -- to arrive. What was the real life consequence of
- 17 that?
- 18 A. Well, if you'd got a very poorly patient, and especially
- if it's on a weekend, it would take longer on a weekend,
- 20 but if you got somebody who was poorly, then usually by
- 21 the time Public Health Wales or the local health board
- brought one to the home, then they were dead, because,
- you know, it just took too long to get them. And I did
- 24 ask on one occasion, could I use that swab to test
- another patient, and they said to me, "no, they're
- 1 be asymptomatic ..."
- 2 A. Yeah.
- 3 Q. "... until they then become suddenly very will ..."
- 4 A. Yeah.
- 5 Q. "... and [then they do not survive] longer than 48 hours
- 6 ..."
- 7 And you explain, you say you ask for the test, it
- 8 takes 36 to 48 hours and by that time the patient is
- 9 dead, and the swab is wasted.
- 10 And importantly, what then happens, is that person
- 11 is not recorded --
- 12 **A.** No
- 13 **Q**. -- as having Covid-19 --
- 14 **A.** No
- 15 Q. -- because they've never been tested?
- 16 **A.** No.
- 17 Q. Thank you. I'm going to turn now, if I may, back to the
- 18 situation involving the deaths of residents within your
- 19 home. And you explain that in terms of the pre-pandemic
- 20 position, it was not unusual.
- 21 A. Yes
- 22 $\,$ Q. You'd have a couple of deaths a month from natural
- causes, and you explained why that is.
- 24 **A.** Yes
- 25 **Q.** It's owing to the cohort of people that you look after?

- 1 all -- they've all got their names written on them" and
- 2 I said, "What happens it to now?" And they said,
- 3 "They'll be disposed of".
- 4 Q. So it simply couldn't be used?
- 5 A. No it couldn't be used for anybody else.
- 6 Q. Now, in relation to testing you wrote to various
- 7 politicians --
- 8 A. Yeah.
- 9 Q. -- and Local Assembly members on a number of
- 10 occasions --
- 11 A. Yeah.
- 12 Q. -- urging, effectively, wider-scale testing, testing to
- be extended to all care home residents and staff.
- 14 A. Yeah
- 15 Q. I just want to bring up, if I may, one of the emails
- 16 that you sent on 4 May.
- 17 It's INQ000598472.
- This is one of the emails, as I say, that you sent,
- 19 and this is your response in due course. This is dated
- 20 4 May
- 21 **A.** Mm.
- 22 Q. You set out this here, don't you?
- 23 A. Yeah.
- 24 Q. Because what you say is, your:
- 25 "... evidence is showing that the very elderly can
- 1 A. Yes.
- 2 Q. And reflected that demographic. With regard to the
- 3 pandemic, you explain within your statement that the
- 4 types of patients that you often had changed?
- 5 A. Yes.
- 6 Q. And that they were much closer to end of life
- 7 themselves --
- 8 **A.** Yes.
- 9 Q. -- and were deteriorating rapidly --
- 10 **A**. Yes
- 11 Q. -- and consequently the number of deaths that you and
- 12 your colleagues experienced rose significantly during
- 13 that time?
- 14 A. Yes, they did.
- 15 Q. Do you recall the first death of a Covid-19 positive
- 16 patient of yours?
- 17 **A.** I do.
- 18 Q. Can I just ask you some details about that, if I may.
- 19 On that occasion, I understand that it was an elderly
- 20 gentleman who had --
- 21 **A.** No, a lady.
- 22 Q. A lady, my apologies.
- 23 **A.** Yeah.
- 24 Q. A lady who had become unwell?
- 25 **A.** Yeah.

		UP
1	Q.	And that you requested a test
2	Α.	Yeah
3	Q.	again from Public Health Wales, as we've already been
4	Ψ.	through, that test subsequently came too late?
5	Α.	Yeah.
6	Q.	in the day. But I want to concentrate, if I may,
7	α.	upon your requests for medical assistance.
8	Α.	Yeah.
9	Q.	And oxygen in particular?
10	Α.	Yeah.
11	Q.	Her oxygen levels were low.
12	Α.	Yes.
13	Q.	And you sought a prescription; is that right?
14	Α.	That's right.
15	Q.	And what response did you get?
16	Α.	The this lady became quite poorly very quickly. She
17		was a very fit lady, and I noticed she became quite
18		poorly. Her temperature was rising, and she did start
19		with a bit of a cough.
20		So we rang the GP. Of course, with the wi-fi, you
21		don't we couldn't get an accurate picture because the
22		wi-fi would break up, so she couldn't see her.
23		So I said to the GP she was a locum GP, she
24		wasn't a local GP and I said, "I need some oxygen for
25		this lady and some antibiotics."
		.20
1 2	LA	DY HALLETT: Try having a drink of water. That sometimes helps.
3	A.	She was our first Covid death. And she was a lovely
4		lady.
5		Vernon had to go in the room, and she just said,
6		"Help me, Vernon. Help me. Help me. I can't breathe."
7		Because we couldn't open the window for her.
8		And I just made him get out because he'd never seen
9		anything like this. We'd never seen anything it was
10		literally she was literally gasping for air. And we
11		couldn't do anything. We didn't have anything to give
12		her.
13		But he got very distressed, but not as distressed as
14		her. But she so it was literally like taking a fish
15		out of water, and they couldn't they couldn't
16		they're suffocating, they couldn't breathe. And without
17		that relief of the oxygen, although it's little we
18		knew there was not much we could do, but there was no
19		relief for this woman. It was horrific. And
20		unfortunately, Vern saw that. He didn't get involved

with the death of patients, but that was horrific. And

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But yeah, it was -- by the time we got the swab for

she was just begging him for help.

her, she'd gone, she'd died, unfortunately.

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Horrifically.

So she prescribed the antibiotics and she did say to 1 2 me, "How do I do the oxygen?" 3 So I said, "Well, you write me a prescription, we 4 come and pick it up, then we take it to the chemist and then we get some oxygen" -- or whichever body where we 5 6 take the prescription to -- "and we get the oxygen." 7 And she said, "Well, the prescriptions will be here 8 tonight." q So we picked up the prescription from the GP's 10 practice. By this time it was 6 o'clock, so everywhere 11 was closed. So I couldn't get any oxygen. So the very next day, I rang the G -- her own GP, who was then back 12 13 on duty, and I said the same thing to them, "This lady 14 is deteriorating overnight, she's very poorly, I need 15 some oxygen. I need to pick -- we've picked up the 16 antibiotics, I need the oxygen, I need it ASAP." 17 Because her oxygen levels were dropping down. And she prescribed end-of-life drugs. And we never 18 19 ever got the oxygen. Ever. 20 Indeed, you deal with more generally the issue of oxygen 21 within your statement, explaining --22 Yes. The sad thing with this lady is -- and it's hard, 23 because we knew this was our first ... 24 Q. Yes. 25 A. She was ... 126

MS CECIL: Indeed, and in your statement you set out how important oxygen often is in providing that comfort,
 effectively?
 Yeah, it did give them relief, yeah.

Q. Just -- if I may just draw that document up on screen,your email, you make that point very forcefully there.

7 It's the one that ends 598472.

8 You explain that you have no oxygen generally on 9 site --

10 **A.** No.

11 Q. -- because it was decided a few years ago that you could
 12 not keep it there, even for emergencies.

13 **A**. No

14 Q. It had to be prescribed. But instead of GPs prescribingit, they give you end-of-life drugs instead?

16 **A.** Yes.

17 Q. And you explain that relatives would be horrified?

18 A. Yeah. Yeah. That's how easily it was --

19 **Q.** Indeed.

And you go on to provide a very vivid description below that, which is:

"As a patient's oxygen saturation level drops with this disease [with Covid] they are gasping for breath, and [you] cannot give any oxygen relief at all ..."

25 **A.** No.

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- Q. And as that's the only treatment for Covid-19 you found 1
- 2 that disgraceful because obviously that's available at
- 3 hospitals.
- 4 A. Yeah.
- 5 Q. Touching then on -- and continuing on down, you explain
- 6
- "... paramedics do not want to admit from care 7
- 8 homes ..."
- 9 A. No.
- 10 Q. "... [anyone] showing ... COVID19 symptoms ..."
- Was that your experience in terms of your patients 11
- within the home? 12
- 13 A. Yes.
- Q. At that point they were "left with no oxygen relief or 14
- any further treatment". 15
- 16 A. This lady as well, she didn't get swabbed, so she wasn't
- 17 counted as one of the numbers, and I knew it was Covid.
- Q. In general terms, with regard to access to healthcare 18
- 19 and hospital treatment, did you experience any other --
- 20 just moving on to that general topic now, if I may.
- 21 A. Yeah.
- 22 You also had experience of patients with unrelated
- 23 Covid --
- 24 Α. Yes
- 25 -- unrelated illnesses to Covid-19 --

- 1 ambulance was outside for three hours, until somebody from the ambulance headquarters admitted to take him in.
- 2
- 3 And they said to me -- they weren't local ambulance
- 4 men, I don't know where they were from -- but they said
- 5 to me, "The hospital aren't going to be very pleased
- 6 with this", and I went outside the building and I did
- 7 say to the ambulancemen, "It's not up to you to play God
- 8 here. You're just taking in poorly patients into
- 9 hospital. You don't get to decide, unfortunately, who
- 10 lives or dies in this home."
- 11 But -- they weren't very pleased with me, but that 12
 - was how I felt. I felt that nobody is speaking up for
- 13 my patients.
- 14 Q. Thank you.
 - I just want to move to a related topic which is do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation notices.
- 16 17 Α.

- Q. And you explain in your statement that all GPs had put 18
- in place DNACPRs on their patients. 19
- 20 Α. Yeah.
- Q. Was that all of your patients within the care home? 21
- 22 A. Yes, yes. I came back from a meeting and 50% of them
- 23 had already had the paperwork in place because it had
- 24 been sent to them, and they all had DNRs in place.
- 25 And was there, to your knowledge, any consultation --Q. 131

- Yes 1 A.
- 2 Q. -- who ambulances refused, initially, to take to
- 3 hospital?
- 4 A. Yes.
- That was involving diabetes --5 Q.
- 6 A.
- 7 Q. -- blood sugar levels lowering?
- 8 Α.
- Q. But also where a patient of yours fell and received 9
- 10 a fracture?
- Yes, yeah. With the case of the gentleman, he came in 11
- 12 for respite care. He was waiting for an operation. And
- 13 he developed an infection, so he'd got a slight
- 14 temperature. So the ambulance men said that because
- 15 he'd got a slight temperature when he came in -- because
- 16 he was semi-comatose because of his diabetes and I -- we
- 17 can give glucose as a nurse -- sorry, we can give
- 18 insulin if they're hyper, but if they're hypo I can't
- 19 give intravenous glucose.
- 20 So without getting GPs there, we rang an
- 21 ambulance -- well, the GP told me to ring an ambulance.
- 22 So the paramedics came, and because he'd got a slight
- 23 temperature, obviously because he'd got an infection,
- 24 they refused to take him. And it took me three hours to
- 25 argue for him to be admitted into hospital. And the
 - 130
- 1 A. No.
- 2 -- with the patient or their families?
- 3 No. I managed to speak to some of the patients'
- 4 relatives before they -- this was slightly before
- lockdown this was happening, this was before lockdown. 5
- 6 And two of the relatives, I managed to get in touch with
- 7 them, and they got hold of their GP, and it was removed,
- 8 because they didn't agree with it. They spoke to their
- 9 parents about it, and they didn't want it in place
- 10 either, and it was removed. That's the only two.
- Q. Prior to lockdown, where there were those notices in place, would, nonetheless, that individual be taken to
- 12
- 13 hospital if necessary?
- 14 Α. If what, sorry?
- Q. If there was a notice in place --15
- Yes. 16 A.

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- 17 Q. -- for an individual patient of yours --
- 18 Α.
- 19 -- would they, nonetheless, be taken to hospital for Q.
- 20 treatment?
- 21 Α. Yes, yes.
- 22 Q. Did you see any change in that during the pandemic?
- 23 Yes. We found that ambulance drivers and paramedics
- 24 were not happy to transport any patients to hospital, if
- 25 that needs -- like, when that lady fell, unless there

- was a DNR in place. And I'd never come across that before. So that was a relatively new consequence to me.
- 3 **Q.** Thank you. I now want to move on, if I may, just to --
- 4 you've touched upon the impact upon your patients
- 5 already in the home.
- 6 A. Yeah.

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- 7 Q. Obviously things were significantly restricted. Did you
- 8 see any decline in their mental, cognitive and physical
- 9 abilities, as a consequence?
- 10 A. Of being isolated?
- 11 Q. Of being isolated.
- 12 A. Yeah, what we did was, those who could, we gave them
- 13 all, or I asked the relatives to bring in individual
- mobile phones so they could speak to them over the
 - phone. Because we didn't, as I say, we didn't have very
- 16 good wi-fi so they couldn't Facetime anybody or their
- 17 relatives. But yes, they did become, they became quite
- 18 sad and isolated. But I must admit, they knew what was
- going on, even though my patients were quite poorly,
- 20 I didn't have many with dementia. So they knew what was
- going on, and they were quite happy to be isolated from
- 22 other patients, but their mental health did suffer
- 23 because of that.
- 24 Q. Of course. And you explain, and I'm not going to go
- 25 through it in detail, the various steps you took to try
- came on duty and then worked their shift and then they slept on site and then they came back to work until their days off, and then they would leave everything behind and go home so they didn't risk taking it home.

 But they were all absolutely terrified.

And after -- as I say, they worked so hard. But after we lost that patient they became increasingly worried because we knew that was an abnormal death and we knew it wasn't a normal average death. So we knew this lady had got Covid, so a lot more staff went off that had got young children, they were frightened.

At one time there, because it was spring and summer, as well, we had a lot of hay fever sufferers, and because of course, because we'd got no testing at all, if they'd got the slightest sniffle, they weren't allowed in. So in one week alone I had 15 staff off with hay fever symptoms, but I couldn't get any of them tested.

19 Q. Indeed. And just dealing with those staff shortages,
 20 I understand that where staff were unable to work that
 21 you or other members of staff would effectively be
 22 picking up those shifts --

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- 23 **A.** Yeah.
- 24 Q. -- working double shifts -- (overspeaking) --
- 25 A. We were working 16, 20 hours, yes.

- 1 to ensure that people could have visits --
- 2 A. Yes
- Q. -- including, effectively, building an atrium-type
 visiting booth so that individuals could come in that
- 5 way --
- 6 A. That was during the second wave --
- Q. Indeed, during the second wave, so they could speak totheir relatives --
- 9 **A.** Yes.
- 10 Q. -- and have those visits?
- 11 A. Yes
- 12 $\,$ $\,$ $\,$ Q. $\,$ And in terms of your staff, and the impact on your
- 13 staff, how would you describe that?
- 14 A. They were terrified. They worked nonstop, those that
- 15 could. There were some that had, they couldn't come to
- 16 work anymore because they were shielding, they had
- 17 relatives of their own at home that they were
- protecting. So a lot of staff then went off to be
- 19 furloughed, really, because they couldn't do that.
- 20 But people with young children, they were terrified.
- They didn't know who'd got Covid, who hadn't got Covid,
- 22 if they were taking it home to their families. So we
- 23 had a caravan on site so a lot of staff -- and we had an
- 24 annex that was an attic upstairs, so a lot of the staff
- 25 didn't go home at all until their days off. So they
 - 134
- 1 Q. Because you effectively had a permanent cohort of staff.
- 2 A. Yes
- 3 **Q.** You did not use agency staff at any point during the
- 4 pandemic.
- 5 A. No, no.
- 6 Q. One of the other points you raise in relation to the
- 7 staff shortages is related to childcare and where you
- 8 had problems with schools not accepting that your
- 9 workers were key workers?
- 10 A. Yes.
- 11 Q. All of which, obviously, pointed to a very, very
- 12 pressurised, difficult, challenging time in relation to
- 13 staffing?
- 14 **A.** Yeah.
- 15 Q. I want to turn now to the impact on you and your husband
- 16 at that time. As I say, you set that out within your
- 17 statement. You explain that by this point, by later in
- the pandemic, you were working 16-hour days?
- 19 **A.** Yeah.
- 20 Q. And that was quite normal, you were up early?
- 21 **A.** Yes.
- 22 $\,$ Q. You'd often be up in the evenings, in the nighttime.
- You would be there -- if there was a death at night it
- 24 would fall to you --
- 25 **A.** Yes.

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1	Q.	to record that.
2	A.	Yes.
3	Q.	And Vernon would be dealing with various building
4		problems and different issues that arose in that regard
5		too?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. So the two of you were working under intense pressure?

A. Yeah.

9 Q. And lengthy hours, with no respite?

4 - 41- - 4

10 A. No.

11 Q. In terms of those pressures, with regard to Vernon, how12 did that period, from the February period of time to the

13 May of 2020 impact upon him?

A. Well, unfortunately, his workload increased dramatically 14 15 because trying to get supplies in, he was having to 16 queue at supermarkets and the cash and carry and things. 17 Everything took so much longer. One day he came back and he'd been queueing at B&Q to get in for two hours 18 19 for a ballcock to repair a toilet. And then when he was 20 there, something else broke and he said, "I've got to go 21 back and queue" for something minor again. But in 22 between that time, he was also counted -- because the 23 staff, you know, some of the staff would go off until we

could get a test and they could come back to work, he
 was also counted in some of the numbers for some of the
 137

1 were there. But this was on from morning until night. 2 Our TV was on -- when we were watching what was 3 developing every single day. And then when 4 Boris Johnson said that they were going to test in care 5 homes there was such a relief for us all to start being 6 tested, and on that very same week, Mr Drakeford turned 7 that around. He said they won't be doing it in Welsh 8 care homes, in Wales, because he didn't see ... well, in 9 fact, his words were the resources would be better spent

And we just -- we just sat back in the chair, and he just said to me "What do we do now?"

And I said, "I don't know. I don't know. We justkeep working."

15 Q. And you explain very vividly in your statement thatVernon began to lose weight?

17 **A**. He did.

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18 Q. He became, as you say, more depressed, effectively?

19 A. He did, yeah.

elsewhere.

Q. He'd seen an awful lot of horrific situations arisingwithin the home --

22 A. Yes.

Q. -- in terms of people dying at that stage, and you triedto reassure him --

25 **A.** I did.

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more able-bodied people to help feed. So there was -he was allocated five patients who were -- who he would
sit and chat to and give them their breakfast and give
them ...

So in between doing all this he would come in, so we'd get up and give them their breakfast, these five patients, or take their breakfast to the rooms or feed those who needed feeding. And then he'd start and do his bit and then he'd come back at lunchtime and do his five, and then he'd go back out and get some more supplies in or repair whatever he had to repair, and then come back at teatime and then, you know, feed the five patients again.

Every single day this was.

So if ever one of them would say they fancied fish and chips, or they fancied something, he'd go and get them something different because these five patients were his, so he would treat them to a sherry, or whatever, and go and take them sherry or glass of whisky.

But yeah, his workload did increase but also, what also affected, but unbeknown to us, was he was watching this on the TV. Well, we both were. Every single day. There was a rule in the house that we don't normally put the TV on until 6 o'clock at night unless grandchildren 138

Q. -- at various points, including saying, "Soon we will have some respite, we will go on a break."

A. Yeah, I said to him, "At the end of June, at the end of
 June we're going to Spain no matter what. We are going
 to -- June we are going to Spain."

It's the last thing I said to him.

7 Q. No, I appreciate that, Ms Hough.

8 And sadly, on 21 May, you were notified, weren't you, by an officer --

A. Well, this was on the Wednesday, the 20th, and we were having a glass of sherry outside, funnily enough, and
I said, "We're going to go to Spain", and then he came back down and said, "How are we going to go with this epidemic -- with this pandemic?"

15 And I said, "We put our gloves and masks on and we just go, we just go."

And then on the Thursday, he'd gone to work, as I -well, he had gone to work. He'd even fed his patients.
He'd fed his patients and I thought he'd gone shopping.
And then the police came and told me that unfortunately
he'd been found in the police car park, and he'd shot
himself, in the police car park, in the car.

23 LADY HALLETT: I think that's enough.

24 **MS CECIL:** Thank you, Ms Hough, I think that's as far as we need to go today. Thank you very much.

1	LADY HALLETT: You've been so extraordinarily brave. And
2	I know it's been in your statement, and members of the
3	public may not know, but given how you were treated by
4	certain sections of the media when your husband's death
5	became public, I can't tell you how impressed I am by

- 6 the courage that you've shown --
- 7 THE WITNESS: Oh, thank you.
- 8 LADY HALLETT: -- in coming to tell us. Because what you've
- 9 had to tell the Inquiry, and indeed the public, is so
- 10 important. It's obviously, it covers all sorts of
- 11 different aspects of the Covid pandemic, and we are
- 12 extremely grateful to you.
- 13 THE WITNESS: Thank you. I just think the public should
- 14 know --
- 15 LADY HALLETT: Exactly.
- 16 THE WITNESS: -- that it was extremely hard. We had nothing
- in the care homes at all. Nothing. No help.
- 18 LADY HALLETT: I hope you feel it's been a help. I can't
- 19 imagine what it's like reliving it all.
- 20 THE WITNESS: Yes. It's fine.
- 21 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed.
- 22 THE WITNESS: Yes.
- 23 LADY HALLETT: We're going to break now and I know
- 24 a representative will come and see you and talk to you
- 25 before you go. And don't forget we also have 141
- 1 Institute for Health and Care Research research
- 2 professorship?
- 3 A. Yes, that's right.
- 4 Q. You are trained as a junior doctor?
- 5 A. Yeah.
- 6 Q. You trained in epidemiology and population health. You
- 7 have had a number of research published in high-impact
- 8 journals. I won't name them all. And you have
- 9 conducted a number of pieces of published research on
- 10 infection that are relevant to adult social care?
- 11 A. Yes, that's right.
- 12 Q. And if anyone wishes to read more about the professor's
- background, they can do so at paragraphs 3 to 5 of her
- 14 statement.
- 15 May I turn, though, please, firstly to the Vivaldi
- 16 project. Could you just help us, please. It was set up
- 17 by you to look at national -- Covid-19 in care homes.
- 18 It was funded by the Department of Health and Social
- 19 Care; is that right?
- 20 A. Yes, that is.
- 21 $\,$ Q. $\,$ And then, in due course, subsequently funded by what
- 22 came to be known as the UK Health Security Agency?
- 23 A. Yes, that's right.
- ${\bf 24}~{\bf Q}.~{\bf And}$ just as an overview, can you tell us what was the
- 25 study set up to do?
- 143

- 1 a counselling team here if you need it.
 - THE WITNESS: That's all right, thank you.
- 3 LADY HALLETT: I shall return at 2.20.
- 4 (1.20 pm)
 - (The Short Adjournment)
- 6 (2.22 pm)

- 7 LADY HALLETT: Ms Carey.
- 8 MS CAREY: My Lady, may I call, please, Professor Laura
- 9 Shallcross.
- 10 PROFESSOR LAURA SHALLCROSS (affirmed)
- 11 Questions from LEAD COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY FOR MODULE 6
- 12 LADY HALLETT: Professor Shallcross, thank you for your
- patience, we got to you as soon as we could.
- 14 THE WITNESS: Thank you.
- 15 MS CAREY: Professor, your full name, please.
- 16 A. Laura Jane Frances Shallcross.
- 17 Q. I hope you have in front of you your statement ending in
- 18 613177, dated 2 May of this year.
- 19 A. I do.
- 20 Q. I'm going to ask you, Professor, a number of questions
- about what came to be known as the Vivaldi Study. But
- before I do, can I just introduce you to everyone.
- 23 I believe you are the Professor of Public Health and
- 24 Translational Data Science, Director of the Institute of
- 25 Health Informatics at UCL, and you hold a National 142
 - A. So do you mean for the survey, initially?
- 2 Q. Well, there's two parts of the study: there's a survey
- and a study, but just generally speaking, what was the
- 4 aim of Vivaldi?
- 5 A. Okay. So, very broadly speaking, the aim of Vivaldi was
- 6 to generate evidence to support the public health
- 7 response to Covid in care homes, and we did that, as you
- 8 said, through a survey which was done very quickly, and
- 9 through a cohort study which was done over a three-year
- 10 period ultimately.
- 11 Q. Can put it this way: was it designed to try and
- 12 understand why there was such high infection rates in
- 13 care homes?
- 14 A. Yes, that's right. So it was really recognising that we
- 15 didn't have the data or the evidence that we needed to
- 16 understand what was going on and so a research study was
- our way of trying to generate that information quickly.
- 18 Q. All right. And was it also designed to try and
- 19 understand what disease control, what -- we called it
- sometimes IPC, measures could be used to try and mitigate the risk of the disease in care homes?
- 22 **A.** Yeah, exactly. So, yes.
- 23 Q. Now I think you first got involved when you were
- 24 approached by Professor Susan Hopkins of PHE, as it then
- 25 was, on 8 May of 2020?

- 1 A. That's right.
- 2 Q. Right. Can I ask you, though, at the outset, given that
- 3 there was involvement by PHE and funding by the
- 4 Department of Health and UKHSA in due course, do you
- 5 consider that Vivaldi was nonetheless an independent
- 6 study of the infection rates, and like, in care homes?
- 7 A. Yes, absolutely, I do. So we had complete -- when I say
- 8 "we", the research team had total control over the
- 9 design and the analysis of all the data in the study.
- 10 Q. So if anyone were to think that because you were being11 paid by the Department and UKHSA you were therefore
- singing their tune, would that be right or wrong?
- 13 A. That would be absolutely wrong.
- 14 Q. Thank you.
- 15 LADY HALLETT: As far as research projects are concerned,
- forgive me, because I'm not an academic so I don't
- 17 necessarily know that much, but it's perfectly common
- 18 for government departments to sponsor a research that
- remains independent, even though they may be the purse
- 20 holder?
- 21 A. That's right. So, for example, the National Institute
- 22 for Health and Care Research receive their funding from
- 23 the government but all the research is done
- 24 independently and that's a very traditional model that's
- used for research, yes.

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- 1 so partly through the CATCH-19 study as well, and our
 - formal reporting was initially to the Data Debrief Group
- 3 at the Department of Health and Social Care, and there
- 4 was very much a requirement that we would report into
- 5 that group. And as we started doing that, it made sense
- 6 to do the same into the SAGE Social Care Working Group.
- 7 Q. Let me deal with that straight away. I think you say at
- 8 your paragraph 14 there were two formal mechanisms by
- 9 which Vivaldi's results were shared, one was with the
- 10 DHSC Data Debrief Group.
- 10 DHSC Data Debrief Group
- 11 A. That's right.
- 12 Q. Is that correct?
- 13 **A.** Yes.

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- 14 Q. Which met on a Thursday, and then you also reported into
- 15 the SAGE Social Care Working Group which met on
- 16 a Friday?
- 17 A. That's right. But we were funded and commissioned by
- the Data Debrief Group in Pillar 4, so that was really
- the line management for the study.
- 20 Q. Given, though, that you were attending the SAGE meetings
- 21 on a Friday, how receptive did you find SAGE to the
- 22 Vivaldi project and its findings in due course?
- 23 $\,$ A. So I would say once we were fully established and we
- 24 were generating useful evidence, absolutely, very
- 25 receptive. Everybody was very keen to have as much data 147

- 1 MS CAREY: Thank you very much.
- 2 I think you set out in your statement, Professor,
- 3 that you were involved in a number of meetings convened
 - by the Health Data Research UK organisation which
- 5 brought together a number of researchers and in due
- 6 course became the study that you set up; is that right?
- 7 **A.** So my recall is actually, though, it was only one
- 8 meeting for Health Data Research UK.
- 9 Q. Right, thank you.
- 10 A. It was more that the individuals who attended that
- 11 meeting, some of those people then became involved in
- 12 the SAGE Social Care Working Group.
- 13 Q. Thank you very much. And that brings me on to the SAGE
- 14 Social Care Working Group. I think from May 2020,
- 15 19 May 2020 onwards you began attending SAGE Social Care
- 16 Working Group to report on progress?
- 17 A. That's right.
- 18 **Q**. So you were asked to set it up by Professor Hopkins on
- 19 9 May, from 19 May onwards, you're reporting on
- 20 progress, I think it's a few months later that you
- 21 actually start to produce the findings and report those
- 22 as you go along?
- 23 A. So I would say that we -- that the attendance at the
- 24 SAGE Social Care Working Group was more as part of that
- group and being somebody who was involved in research,

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- 1 as possible to try and inform their policy and decision
- 2 making. I would say at the beginning, when we were
- 3 setting this study up, and this was particularly as the
- 4 emergence of the data within the NHS Foundry occurred,
- 5 there was perhaps a little tension about different types
 - of data and which kinds of data might be prioritised.
- 7 So I think it took a bit of time for the value of
- 8 what we were doing to be acknowledged, but once we were
- 9 up and running, absolutely everybody was very receptive
- 10 to the information we were putting out.
- 11 **Q.** Can I just can you, please, about some of the things you
- just said in that last answer, because people may not be
- familiar with the various data streams and how they're
- 14 connected and collated.
- 15 A. Yes.

6

- 16 Q. Just tell us, what is the NHS data -- Foundry?
- 17 A. So NHS Foundry was set up during the pandemic to support
- the response. It was managed by NHS England, and it
- 19 brought together lots of different kinds of datasets,
- 20 including the testing data, in one location to enable
- 21 people to conduct research using those datasets to
- 22 support the pandemic response. So it was an incredibly
- valuable source of information for us in the Vivaldi
- 24 Study.
- 25 Q. So when you said there was perhaps a little tension

1		between different types of data, can you just give us	1		And could I have up on screen, please, INQ000253601.
2		a flavour of what that tension was, please.	2		This is a paper called the "Care Home Analysis" from
3	A.	I think there are well-established systems that are used	3		12 May 2020, so the week before you started attending
4		for public health disease monitoring, and this was a new	4		the meetings.
5		one, and it was just taking some time for that, for the	5		First things first, did you see this paper at the
6		quality of the data, the opportunities around this data,	6		time?
7		to be made clear to everybody. So I think it was	7	A.	I don't recall seeing this paper at the time.
8		largely around the unfamiliarity, it was just a new	8	Q.	If we go, please, to page 2 of the paper, we can see at
9		thing.	9		the top there a number of questions that were to be
10	Q.	May I ask you this: did you get any sense that there	10		considered by SAGE, some of which seemed to impinge on
11		were people at SAGE or in the DHSC data debrief meetings	11		some of the work that Vivaldi was doing, potentially.
12		that didn't want to know how bad the infection rates	12		They want to know:
13		were in care homes?	13		"[Does] SAGE support the conclusions presented about
14	A.	I don't think I'm well placed to answer that question.	14		the characteristics of vulnerability of care homes,
15		So I worked closely with colleagues at the Department of	15		based in moderate data
16		Health and Social Care, and I think that some of the	16		"Do SAGE agree that there is strong confidence that
17		navigation of how to maximise the impact of our work was	17		there has been a decline in all-cause mortality in care
18		done by them, not by me. And so I was one step removed	18		homes"
19		from it.	19		By 12 May we're talking about.
20	Q.	Can I go back to the beginning, when Vivaldi was set up,	20		There's recommendations on testing.
21		and I think you say that you first attended a SAGE	21		"[Does] SAGE support the need for further data
22		Social Care Working Group meeting on 19 May.	22		collection"
23		I'd like to ask you about a paper that came out the	23		And:
24		week before, and if it helps you, Professor, it's in	24		"[Does] SAGE support the recommendations on future
25		your tab 14 in your bundle.	25		research priorities"
		149			150
1		Then can I just ask you about the next bit:	1		be something more within your remit of this document,
2		"Are there any proposed	2		and one can see there that this paper recognised some
3		"Expand analyses to consider risks in domiciliary	3		data gaps. And if one looks at the second bullet point,
4		care."	4		the data gap was considered to be:
5	A.	Mm-mm.	5		"Better linkage between hospital discharge notes and
6	Q.	Were you asked, as part of Vivaldi, to look at the	6		care home readmission would help to assess more
7		impact in relation to domiciliary care at all?	7		accurately the connectedness/transmission from hospital
8	A.	No, not at all.	8		and care home settings and vice [versa]. [They] will
9	Q.	Do you have a view though, given your understanding of	9		explore options moving forward."
10		the social care sector and your previous involvement in	10		Did you have any difficulty, when you were
11		research, as to whether there is in fact enough research	11		conducting the Vivaldi Study, of linking hospital
12		on the impact on infectious diseases on the domiciliary	12		discharge notes and care home readmissions, just as
13		care side of the care sector?	13		a general question?
14	A.	Purely in relation to the pandemic. So I think that	14	A.	I mean, my first question would be what do these words
15		this was a gap that was identified, but it was also	15		mean exactly? Because hospital discharge notes, there's
16		recognised how difficult it was to try to address it.	16		no way that we would be able to get access to that
17	Q.	Are you able to give us a flavour of those difficulties?	17		information.
18	A.	I think one of the key challenges is around data and	18		If they mean routine data, about dates that people
19		identifying the population, and it's hard to do that in	19		were discharged from hospitals and dates that people
20		care homes but it's logarithmically harder to do that	20		were admitted to care homes, that was something that we
21		for domiciliary care, and that's one of the key	21		could do, potentially. But it's quite challenging,
22		challenges.	22		because of issues around the data. What I would say is
23		But I really had I recognised it as a problem but	23		that this particular report preceded my involvement.
		it was not something that I had any involvement in.			

25 **Q.** Thank you. Can I just turn to page 5, though, which may

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look at what access to data Vivaldi had, it did not

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1 include hospital discharge notes?

2 **A.** No.

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- Q. So you didn't know patient A left with this medication,
 these care needs, they've been in and had that treatment
 done? Nothing like that at all?
- 6 A. Sadly, that information does not exist in an accessible7 format.
- 8 Q. At page 6 of this document there is reference to
 9 "large scale implementation of testing in care homes".
 10 And it's said there that it's:

"... central to preventing and managing outbreaks. Testing can only support reduction of infection rates if coupled with actions to reduce contacts with positive cases and infection control more generally."

Then, if one looks, there's bullet points, and I'm going to summarise them as recommendations as to how to potentially address that problem: testing clearly high-risk care homes that had not reported an outbreak, testing residents and staff, weekly regular testing.

Looking at those bullet points there, Professor, do you agree that those recommendations are necessary and that we need to know the answers to those particular outcomes?

A. So I think, broadly speaking, we needed testing in care
 homes, and some of these points are around trying to
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very quickly [up and running] with strong project management ... However, there was a lack of clarity about how the commissioning and funding processes would work for the study."

Can you just give us an idea of what you meant there?

A. Yeah, and I guess I should preface this with it was just such an unusual situation to be in, it's not normal that you set up a research study in this way. So we started the work. I was very lucky that UCL were quite willing to be supportive, and there were financial implications that were just put up with by the university. But I think as time wore on, it became clear that this was not going to be a six-month project, and so we were funded for 12 months in the first instance and we had to then rebid for funding which meant writing business cases which meant -- and this was quite -- it was time consuming in a sense. We had to justify certain requests for, you know, computers or for additional laboratory testing. Those kind of things. And it didn't feel seamless.

I think when you're working with organisations that are used to interacting with universities, a lot of this is understood. We were working quite often with consultants who had been brought in from other companies 155

prioritise the kinds of testing, recognising that
 testing capacity was very limited at this point in the
 pandemic.

4 Q. We're going to come on to that when we look at some of5 the results of Vivaldi in a moment.

You attended, I think, in due course, 31 of 38 meetings of the Social Care Working Group, and presumably you also attended a similar number of the DHSC debrief group. Can I ask you this in relation to DHSC, how helpful did you consider DHSC to be in helping get Vivaldi up and running?

12 So in terms of the project management support we Α. 13 received, it was excellent. So I really felt that we 14 were able to move very quickly. We were able to 15 problem-solve, so to do things at a pace that is not 16 usually possible for research. So examples being 17 ethical approvals would usually take six weeks. We were 18 able to get this done in a couple of days. We needed to 19 problem-solve around things like accessing PPE, how do 20 we dispose of PPE in care homes that are taking part in 21 the study, and all of these were solved quickly by 22 working in partnership with DHSC. So that -- those 23 elements of the study worked really well.

24 Q. You say in your statement, though:

25 "We were able to get the survey and the cohort study 154

and so it took up a lot of time. So I think it could have been more streamlined in how we were working together from a commissioning and funding perspective.

That was particularly in relation to the cohort study.

6 Q. All right, well, we're going to come on to the cohort7 study in a moment.

But just standing back for a moment, you said sort
of the pace was good at the beginning. Can you give us
an idea of how long normally it takes to set up a study
and how long it took to set up Vivaldi?

A. Well, normally you would -- well, in terms of funding,
 it could take 12 months. So that's the -- and writing
 protocols, you would take two months, perhaps, to write
 a protocol. We were writing protocols in 24 hours.

Everything was being done at blistering pace because we recognised there was a desperate need for information

and we were trying very hard to support that.

19 Q. Can I -- please disagree with this if I've got it wrong,
20 but if the, sort of, bureaucratic nature of perhaps some
21 of things that needed to be gone through were lifted,
22 does that help speed up the process but in normal time,
23 I'm afraid bureaucracy reigns?

A. Yes, that's absolutely right, and we've definitely seen
 the return of bureaucracy post-domestic, yes.

- Q. Can I ask you, please, about your paragraph 9,
 Professor, and the Vivaldi Study itself, and why you say
 it was necessary to set up this study.
- 4 A. Yes, so I think the striking -- when I started doing 5 this work, I'm sure everybody in this room is very aware 6 of the newspaper headlines about deaths in care homes 7 and the tragedies that were unfolding, but what was very 8 clear was that there just wasn't any data to support 9 that and so if you can't measure infections or measure 10 outbreaks or find out what's happening to people who 11 have been infected, it's very difficult to know how to 12 try and help.

So there was a real need for data and evidence to try and understand what was going on, and as you said earlier, to try and identify the kinds of strategies that might work to try and reduce the spread of infection and outbreaks.

18 Q. I think up on our screen is, at the start of your19 paragraph 9, where you say:

"There are no systems which routinely monitor infections or hospital admissions in individual care homes, residents, or staff."

Obviously there are the notifications to the public health teams when there's an outbreak --

25 A. Yes.

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are always going to be under-ascertaining the number of people who have an infection and obviously when you have a pandemic like Covid, you have a very big proportion of the home that are infected.

So that was the set up at the start of the pandemic, and that was how public health agencies were able to try and understand what was going on, but once mass testing was brought in, it gave a much clearer picture of the burden of symptomatic and asymptomatic infection, and the extent of those infections and outbreaks.

- Q. Can I see if I've understood that correctly. So clearly
 if there is an outbreak, public health team are
 notified.
- 14 **A**. Yes
- 15 Q. They will test perhaps five of 50 residents, let's say?
- 16 A. That's right.
- 17 Q. Five might test positive, there will be five recorded
 18 cases. There could be 45 other people in the home that
 19 are positive, and that would not be recorded in the
 20 health reporting data?
- A. So I anticipate in that situation they would assume that
 many people had been infected but there wouldn't be any
 testing data to support that.
- Q. But you wouldn't know the precise numbers of theremaining 45 people --

1 Q. -- but you say:

"Establishing a research study was arguably the
 quickest way to address the gap in evidence on the
 burden of Covid-19 in staff and residents ..."

All right. So this was needed to be done, otherwise
we weren't going to know routes of transmission and how
best to potentially -- what measures might mitigate
transmission?

- 9 A. Exactly. And also the ability to respond to the10 emerging questions.
- Q. Can I ask you this: clearly there was the public health
 teams that were notified when there was an outbreak of
 infection. Are you able to explain in what ways the
 reporting of infections to public health teams was an
 effective means of managing outbreaks in the first
- instance, and what difference testing might have made to the managing of outbreaks in care homes?
- 18 **A.** So the standard way this operates, so pre-Covid, andobviously that was still the system in place at the
- beginning of the pandemic, is that care homes are
 requested to notify their local health protection teams
- when they suspect they have an outbreak. That's usually done by phone call. Then those health protection teams
- 23 done by phone call. Then those health protection teams24 will go in and they will do some testing and it's
- 25 usually up to around five cases that get tested. So you
 - A. Yes, that's right.
- 2 Q. -- who were positive and who was negative?
- 3 A. That's right.
- 4 Q. Hence you say there could be significant5 under-reporting.
- 6 A. Yes.

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- 7 **Q.** The study, as you have alluded to a moment ago, was split into two different workstreams, if I can call them that: a survey and the cohort study, and can I look at each in turn and if we may start, please, with the survey and if it helps you, Professor, I'm at your paragraph 12. Just tell us, what was the survey designed to do and who was it designed to survey?
- A. Yes, so it was designed to answer two key questions. So the first was how many people had been infected with
 Covid, care home staff and residents in wave 1? And the second was to try to get insights into the kinds of strategies that might help to reduce outbreaks and infections in those homes.

And we did this by surveying care home managers, so that was the population.

- Q. I think you say in your statement that the care homes --it was a one-off questionnaire of care home managers?
- 24 A. That's right.
- 25 **Q.** We that have, I think, at your tab 7, a summary of the 160

1 project.

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Can I ask, please, to call up on screen INQ000544939 and go to page 2, please, of the document.

But set out there are the aims and objectives of the survey. So by speaking to the care home managers, who were going to collect data on the number of staff and residents in each care home to record care home characteristics.

What is meant by the characteristics?

10 A. So this is really trying to address those data gaps as 11 quickly as possible. So the first is to say we don't 12 know how many people are in these care homes so we can't 13 estimate the proportion infected because we don't have 14 the denominator. And the second around the 15 characteristics, are things like is it a for-profit care 16 home or a not-for-profit care home; what kinds of

17 disease control measures, IPC measures are being used in

18 these homes to try and help us understand what seems to

19 be working and what's not working to inform policy on

20 how to limit the spread of infection.

21 Q. Were there any particular care homes that were included 22 or excluded?

23 A. So eligible care homes were those providing care to over 24 65s or providing dementia care.

25 Q. And I think in due course the survey took about 30

1 because of the question that we'd been set. So we were 2 trying to say how many people have been infected in 3 wave 1 and hence we need to go back in time, recognising 4 that the testing data wasn't in place so we couldn't get 5 this information easily from other sources, from testing 6 data itself.

Q. We'll come on to the specifics in a minute.

But can I go through paragraph 27 of your statement, Professor, which gives a little more detail to how the survey was conducted. You can see the dates there. "Early findings were communicated online by the ONS on 3 July", and then if you can see, Professor, the main findings from the survey was an estimate of the proportion of care home residents and staff who tested positive based on the number of cases reported by the care home managers.

17 A. That's right.

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18 Q. So this relied in part on any records or memory that 19 they had of the residents and staff that had returned 20 a positive test?

21 A. That's right. And the reason we did it like that is 22 because at that time people were getting tested in all 23 sorts of different locations, and if they were tested in 24 the care home, they might get recorded as a staff member 25 or a resident, but if they went to a mass testing centre

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minutes to conduct? 1

2 A. That's right.

3 Q. It was conducted by Ipsos MORI, and there were attempts 4 to contact 8,634 of the eligible care homes. They were

5 analysed and in due course it came out that there were

6 5,126 care homes that were included in the study.

7 A. That's right.

8 Q. And can you help us, is that a large number of care

9 homes to survey, medium? Give us a sense of the scale

10 of that survey.

11 So for a survey, that's large. A.

12 Q. Right.

13 A. And I think that you may suggest that a 56% response 14 rate is not very good, but given the pandemic, given the

15 other pressure on care homes, in my view that is

16 actually a pretty good response rate.

17 It was a lot of care homes that we were able to 18 collect data on.

19 Q. The survey itself was conducted over 26 May to

20 19 June 2020 --

21 A. That's right.

22 Q. -- is that right? And it was asking, though, the care 23

home managers about things that had happened before that

24 date range. Have I got that right?

25 You have got that right. And the purpose of that was

1 outside the care home, we would miss them.

2 Q. Ah, okay.

3 A. So it was the best way to try and get that comprehensive

4 assessment.

5 Q. And the survey found there was 10.5% of care home

6 residents who tested positive?

7 A. Yes.

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8 Q. And 3.8% of staff who tested positive.

9 A. (Witness nodded).

Q. But I think you say at the bottom of that paragraph 10

11 there that it was important to emphasise testing

12 capacity in care homes was very limited during the first

wave of the pandemic.

14 A. (Witness nodded).

15 Q. So many individuals who were infected with Covid did not

16 undergo PCR testing.

17 A. That's right, yes.

18 Q. So did you -- can you help us, were the care home

managers asked any questions about whether people had

20 the symptoms of Covid or was it literally did they test

21 positive or did they not test positive?

22 A. So we did ask about those things but because of the

23 challenges of trying to ascertain what's Covid, what's

24 flu, we were interested in who had tested positive. So,

25 of course, this is an underestimate but we were trying

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- to get some kind of baseline quickly to give us an idea 1 2 of the sort of minimum proportion of people who'd tested 3
- 4 Q. Can I ask you, please, though about something in the 5 middle of that paragraph where you say that "Survey 6 responses were linked to individual level PCR test 7 results between 30 April and 13 June, through the 8 National Testing Programme."

Can you help us with how the survey responses were linked to the PCR tests?

A. Yes. So when we -- as you can appreciate, we were setting up all these studies very quickly and lots of things were changing in the background. So when we started talking about this study, one idea was that we would use the testing, the mass testing data as our outcome so that we would not be asking care home managers, we would be using the PCR test results. But as things evolved, we realised the testing data wasn't going to be there in time. And so we had a rollout of one-off testing per care home and so we used that alongside asking the care home managers.

But whenever you design a research study you have to say what your primary outcome is. So our primary outcome was asking the care home managers, and then our secondary way of trying to look at this was looking at

1 this point, I believe was defined as just one positive 2 in the care home, because everybody was making the 3 assumption there were lots of other cases that weren't 4 being tested, versus a large outbreak.

5 Q. Based on that, you concluded that almost half or all 6 care homes remain vulnerable to Covid in July 2020 7 because they had not had cases in the first wave. And 8 can you explain, Professor, the significance of that 9 finding, please, and -- as far as policy might be 10 concerned?

11 A. So it's really recognising that the problem was going to 12 continue, that all of these care homes we could just 13 potentially see a repeat of what we saw in wave 1 if we 14 were not able to instigate effective control measures to 15 try and reduce the spread of infection.

16 Q. A warning shot, then, for the waves that then came --

17 A. Yes.

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18 Q. -- afterwards?

> To paragraph 31, please. Clearly the other aspect of the survey was to look at use of disease control measures as you call them --

22 Α. (Witness nodded).

> Q. -- to reduce transmission? And the conclusions were that reduced transmission of Covid from staff was associated with adequate sick pay, minimal use of agency

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the testing data, recognising that it was going to be 1 2 even more limited than asking care home managers.

3 Q. Let's come to the findings in your paragraph 30, please, 4 Professor. We'll perhaps have it on screen and I'd like to take this perhaps a little more slowly that I have 5 6 been to date.

> You had data from over 160,000 residents and nearly 250,000 staff members across the 5,126 care homes. Clearly, the proportions of testing positive are the ones we've just looked at.

For the reasons you've explained, it would be an underestimate because it was based on the managers' recall, the number of people infected of course were not necessarily tested in the first wave.

15 But there were 53% of care homes that reported 16 outbreaks and 469 care homes reported large outbreaks 17 which are defined as what, please?

18 So we defined them, and this was an arbitrary definition Α. 19 that we created, because there isn't one, to the best of 20 my knowledge, so we defined this as homes with more than 21 a third of the total number of residents and staff 22 combined testing positive or those with more than 20 23 residents and staff combined testing positive.

> And this was really just to try to get an assessment of the difference between having an outbreak which, at

1 staff, and increased staff-to-bed ratio, so more staff 2 than beds, presumably.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. And staff cohorting with either infected or uninfected 5 residents?

6 Δ Yes

7 Q. Can you help us with how Vivaldi came to those 8 conclusions, please?

A. Yes. So we looked in Vivaldi at four different 9 10 outcomes. So we looked at the infections in residents, 11 infections in staff, outbreaks and large outbreaks. And 12 then in our questionnaires, we asked about those kinds 13 of measures, so things like: Do you use agency staff? 14 Do you never use them? Do you sometimes use them? How 15 often do your staff work across care homes? Very 16 frequently? Not very frequently? And so forth.

So we were able to look at the homes reporting in each of those categories and then compare that to the number of infections or the number of outbreaks in those care homes, and then by doing our epidemiological analysis, that gives us a sense of which of those factors seemed to be most strongly associated with the risk of infection and outbreaks, and -- yeah, that's

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25 Q. So they were the findings that helped reduce the 168

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1 transmission of Covid. 2 Looking at the findings in relation to increased 3 transmission, did Vivaldi find, from residents, that was 4 associated with an increased number of new admissions to 5 the facility? 6 A. Yeah. 7 Q. Can I just pause there, does that mean admissions from 8 either the community or hospitals? 9 A. Yeah, yes. 10 And poor compliance with isolation procedures? Q. 11 A. Yes. 12 So if you didn't have good IPC and there were a large Q. 13 number of admissions, there was a likelihood of 14 increased transmission of Covid in the care home? A. That's right. I think the phrasing of the question was 15

16 about the difficulty in isolating residents and --17 because obviously with residents with dementia, it can 18 be extremely challenging to try to ask residents to stay 19 in their rooms.

20 Q. If we just stay with your paragraph 31, you can see 21 there that you reported the results to the data debrief 22 committee on 11 June, the 18th and then I think the 23 25th, and I'll come on to the different meetings 24 themselves in a moment, and the taskforce, and then to 25 final conclusions in July?

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1 over time and see what happens, and that gives you 2 a better chance of being able to understand cause and 3

4 Q. Right. But you weren't able to do that?

5 A. No, not in this kind of study.

6 Q. All right. Thank you very much. That can come down. 7 I think you said then, obviously you were reporting as 8 the findings emerged. There was a main message on 9 11 June to the Data Debrief to highlight the risk that 10 staff working across multiple sites posed a risk to residents. 11

> On 18 June, again findings suggested that staff working across multiple sites might increase residents' risk of Covid-19, and that staff working across the sites increased the risk of outbreaks.

And on 25 June, you highlighted that regular use of agency staff was likely to be an important risk factor for infection in residents and staff.

19 Yes Α.

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20 Q. And so there we are now at the end of June 2020.

> Can I just ask you about those meetings. Obviously you were reporting to the Data Debrief and then into SAGE as well. Was there any difficulty in you attending the SAGE Care Home Working Group in June 2020 to present those various findings?

1 Were the findings being refined, if I can put it 2 like that, as the study progressed?

A. Exactly. So we were accumulating data all the time. As the questionnaires were being rolled out across care homes by Ipsos MORI, data was coming across to NHS Foundry and we were analysing that in real time, and then looking at that data and trying to share them as widely as we could, because we recognised it was our job to try to inform policymaking.

10 Q. Now, you say:

> "It is ... important to note that the Vivaldi survey was a cross-sectional survey, which can identify associations between risk factors for infections and outcomes, but cannot be used to infer causality."

15 Would you help put that in layman's terms, please. 16 A. Yes. So what that means is that, in a cross-sectional 17 study, you are asking questions about things like your 18 exposure. So what I mean by that are things like: did 19 you use agency staff? How many new admissions you had.

So the factors that you are interested in as being potentially important, and your outcomes, but you're asking those questions at the same time, which means that you don't know if A causes B or if B causes A.

Other kinds of studies let you start off by looking at your agency staff and then you would follow people 170

1 A. So my recall of this was that once we had findings to 2 present, it was -- there was an expectation on us that 3 we would report in each week. So not difficulties

5 Q. And can I just conclude with dealing with the survey by 6 looking at your paragraph 37, and I think, Professor, 7 there's something you want to correct in paragraph 37.

8 A. Oh, yes. Yes --

9 Q. Well, we'll pull it up on the screen because then 10 I think people will be able to follow and make the 11 correction in their own minds, but you said:

> "The ... survey he had a significant impact on policy because [you could] generate [the] results quickly, and at the time there was an absence of evidence ... [the] findings [suggested] that staff were more likely to infect residents than vice versa ... [which] informed the decision to focus limited testing capacity for [Covid] in the first wave on residents, rather than staff. The set-up of the ... Social Care Infection Control fund was supported by two of the recommendations from ... Vivaldi ... to minimise [Covid] transmission ... that movement of care workers between sites should cease and that care worker sick pay should be topped up by [the] government."

That's the nuts and bolts of that paragraph, but

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4 associated with that, that I recall.

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1 help us with the correction you'd like to make.

2 A. Yes, and apologies for this. So that in the sentence 3 that begins "Our preliminary findings", I've 4 accidentally reversed, so it should be -- so I'll read 5 the whole sentence for clarity:

> "Our preliminary findings suggesting that staff were more likely to infect residents than vice versa informed the decision to focus limited testing capacity for SARS-CoV-2 in the first wave of the pandemic on [staff], rather than [residents]."

So those two words have been reversed, and apologies for that.

- 13 Q. So that does tend to suggest that it was staff that were 14 more likely to infect residents than the other way 15 around?
- 16 A. That's right.
- 17 Q. Have I got that right?
- 18 A. That is correct.
- 19 Yes. That's not to say that that was an intentional 20 infection by them.
- 21 A. No.

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- 22 Quite the opposite. Hence why you then made the 23 recommendations that sick pay should be topped up and 24 there needed to be more work done in relation to
- 25 movement of care workers between sites --

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beginning, there was -- were we treading on toes a little? There were organisations whose job it is to provide this kind of data and perhaps we were filling a gap that maybe it shouldn't have existed.

But I think very quickly everybody was focused on trying to get the data that was required, and so people just wanted data to inform policy.

Q. I'd like to ask you about the Vivaldi findings and the extent to which they impinge on the discharge policy to 10 expedite hospital discharges to care homes.

> And can I ask you, please, Professor, to look at your paragraph 38. I think as with most surveys and, indeed, studies, there are caveats that needed to be applied to this, and I think you say in your statement that the questionnaire that was devised, some of the questions were poorly completed by care home managers, only 80% of the 5,126 care homes responded to the question about the number of admissions since 1 March, ie that's the question about admissions from hospital. Is that the question you mean?

- 21 Yes, that's right. Yes. Α.
- 22 Q. Right. And only 40% of care home managers answered the 23 question on the number of residents who returned from
- 24 hospital, and the subset with Covid-19. Do those
- 25 perhaps unanswered questions by some of the respondents 175

▲ Correct

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2 Q. -- as a way of helping reduce the risk of transmission of Covid? 3

- 4 ▲ Correct
- 5 Q. Now, clearly you made the findings. Can you help with 6 what was supposed to happen with the findings thereafter 7 and the extent to which you were aware that they were 8 used to inform policy?
- 9 A. So my understanding is that they were very much used to 10 inform policy. We were presenting this data everywhere, 11 all the time, and often at very short notice.

And I think that the credit for this really goes to my colleague in DHSC, who was really trying extremely hard to make sure that everybody who needed to know about these findings knew about them.

16 But I think -- I think we were able to get the 17 information under the noses of the people who were able 18 to make decisions, and that was a very serious priority 19 for us.

- 20 Q. Given that on any view there were rather bleak findings 21 coming from the Vivaldi Study, did you get any sense 22 that people didn't want to hear the results that Vivaldi 23 was producing?
- 24 A. I don't know that it's not -- that they didn't want to 25 hear the results. I think that perhaps at the 174

1 in your view undermine or mean that the Vivaldi findings 2 don't hold water?

3 So we deliberately didn't report on the latter of those 4 two. So we included new admissions because it was 80% 5 complete and that seems like a fairly reasonable amount 6 of data, and we also did multiple imputation on those as 7 well, I believe, in our work, which is where you try to 8 account for the missingness in that data.

> But we didn't use the other datasets because it was such a large proportion of missingness. We just --I strongly felt it was too risky to try to draw conclusions based on that data.

And I was thinking about this again, and I think one of the reasons why it was incomplete is because those questions were added in late into the questionnaire.

16 Q. Thank you.

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I think it's important to remember, in any event, as I think you've said before, we were relying on the managers' recall of who had come back into the care home and whether they'd come back from hospital, and whether they'd come back from hospital with Covid-19. And of course at the time, certainly between 1 March and about 15 April in England, testing for Covid-19 was extremely limited

25 A. Yes. I think there's also this risk of reverse

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1		causality, which is where the direction is the wrong way
2		round and if you if people are very worried and
3		concerned that discharge from hospital into care homes
4		is causing this problem, then they may be more likely to
5		remember it. And so this is a real challenge with
6		asking people to remember what happened.
7	Q.	You make the point at the bottom of your paragraph 39

- 8 you were unable to account for other routes of
- 9 transmission, such as ingress from staff or visitors.
- 10 Can you help us with what you mean by there and why we
- 11 need to potentially factor that into the Vivaldi
- 12 findings?
- 13 A. Yeah, I wonder if the easiest way to think about this is 14 the diagram that's in the --
- 15 Q. Yes.
- 16 A. -- I think it's Figure 1 in the CMO Technical Report.
- 17 Q. Yes, could we have up on screen, please -- it's your tab 5, Professor, thank you -- INQ000203933, and I think 18 19 it's the one with all the routes into --
- 20 A. That's right.
- Q. Is that the one you're talking about? 21
- 22 A. Yes.

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- 23 Q. Just pause a moment while we bring it up on screen.
- INQ0002039333_0298. Thank you. It does appear in the 24
- 25 technical report as well, but I think in fact we've

example, perhaps we saw different patterns with ingress of infection in London early in the pandemic relative to some other parts.

So the challenge is that if you really want to understand which of these routes is most important, you need to collect data on all of them. And that requires very good testing across all of these different mechanisms which we never had. And so in Vivaldi there are some of these that we are able to say something about, particularly the role of staff, something about people coming in, new admissions, but we didn't collect data on visitors, we didn't collect good data on people coming in from hospital, and so we can't say -- we cannot give accurate information on the relative contribution of these different mechanisms.

- 15 Q. And so to be able to say, for example, that core staff 16 17 were the main route of transmission, you would 18 nonetheless need to test all of the other people on here 19 to be able to work out that that was the main route?
- 20 **A.** Yes, that's my view.
- Q. Right. So essentially you'd have to test everyone? 21
- 22 **A**. Yes.
- 23 Q. And would a one-off testing regime tell you which was 24 the main route of transmission?
- It's going to probably depend at different times of the 25 A. 179

1 taken it out of a slightly different document.

2 298 at the bottom.

There we are. Thank you very much.

This is a schematic showing all the different routes of Covid-19 into care homes: staff, visiting professionals, visitors of residents, residents leaving the care home, for whatever reason, new admissions from the community, residents coming back from hospital, and indeed new admissions from hospital. So there's seven potential routes by which Covid can enter the care home.

11 That's right. A.

12 Q. Can you help us then by when you say, "We were unable to 13 account for the other routes of transmission", why this 14 document helps explain why you couldn't account for those other routes?

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A. Yeah, I think this is a very helpful diagram because 17 what it does is illustrate all the different ways in 18 which infection can get into a care home, but I think 19 it's also important to realise that these changed. This 20 was a dynamic thing. So early in the pandemic, when 21 people could still visit, for example, visitors could 22 potentially bring infection in. Later in the pandemic, 23 that was no longer a mechanism. So this is changing all 24 the time and it also probably played out differently 25 across different regions in the country, you know, for

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1 pandemic. So it's a very difficult question to answer. 2 Q. So you can say what is a route, but not necessarily what

3 is the main route --

4 A. Correct.

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5 Q. -- or routes?

6 A. Based on data from Vivaldi, yes.

7 That brings me on, Professor, if I may, to a question 8 that you were asked by the Inquiry, and I think could we 9 have up on screen your paragraph 43.

I think you are aware of comments made by Mr Matthew Hancock in his Module 2 witness statement and, Professor, you should know he's due to give evidence tomorrow, but he said in Module 2 -- could I have up on screen, please, INQ000613177_21, paragraph 43, where we've set out in the middle there what Mr Hancock said in that statement

He said in his Module 2 statement, and it's in the middle of the page:

"... a widespread concern has been that patients who were discharged from hospitals were the main cause of infections in care homes. While I understand why so many people hold this view, we now know that this is not the case. During the summer of 2020 I was made aware of initial evidence showing that movement of staff between care homes was the main source of transmission, and

I asked for urgent work to be undertaken to place restrictions on such movements."

Now, you were asked to comment on that, Professor, and I think you set out below, and you say:

"Whilst it's accurate that Vivaldi provided evidence supporting the important role of staff in transmission of infection, and the risks associated with movement of staff ... the survey did not [for the reasons you've just told us] provide evidence on the relative importance of different modes of transmission."

Is that correct?

- 12 A. That's correct. So based on data from Vivaldi -- and
 13 I'm aware there are obviously other sources of data on
 14 this point too, but based on data in Vivaldi, yes,
 15 that's correct.
- 16 Q. So it's going beyond what can be concluded properly from

17 Vivaldi --

18 **A.** Yes.

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- 19 Q. -- to say that movement of staff between care homes was20 the main source of transmission?
- 21 A. Yes.
- 22 Q. If I were to substitute "a source of transmission",
- 23 would that be accurate?
- 24 A. Yes.
- 25 Q. Right. Thank you.

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Q. "... and outbreaks, hospital discharge does not appear
 to have been the dominant way in which Covid-19 entered
 care homes".

4 Is Vivaldi able to opine on that or not?

- 5 **A.** No, but I think this is such a -- it's a challenging
 6 issue, so I think the conclusions in this are comparable
 7 with Vivaldi. For the reasons outlined with this
 8 diagram, we have these seven routes of transmission.
 9 There are various studies that are cited in this
 10 evidence and I think it would be fair to say that there
 11 is no -- we don't have a perfect study addressing this
- question, but based on the data that we do have, it doeshighlight the role, important role, of transmission from
- nigniignt the role, important role, of transmission from staff.
- Q. Can I just look at the cohort study with you and perhaps
 then after that, my Lady, it might be a convenient
 moment for a break.
- 18 The cohort study was very different from the survey.
- 19 **A.** Yes.
- 20 $\,$ Q. Can you tell us how the cohort study was set up, please,
- and I'm back in your statement, if it helps you, back to
 paragraph 12 and then various other paragraphs
- 23 thereafter.
- A. So the cohort study was set up at the same time as thesurvey, but it was recognised it was going to take

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I think you are aware that in due course there was
 a SAGE consensus statement --

- 3 **A.** Mm-hm.
- Q. -- published. Would you just give me one moment,
 Professor, to see if I need to go to it. It was not
 published until 26 May of 2022.

7 Can we call up on screen, please, it's your tab 4, 8 if it helps, INQ000215624 2. In fact, if we just flick q over to page 4, you'll see that diagram again. But if 10 we have that in mind, the consensus statement, and go 11 back to page 2, please, the consensus statement found 12 that studies showing that at least some care home 13 outbreaks were caused or partly caused or intensified by 14 discharges from hospital. Did the Vivaldi findings

15 support that or not?

- 16 A. I think Vivaldi -- we don't make a major contribution on
 17 that, but yes, we are definitely compatible with that
 18 statement, yes.
- 19 Q. "However, based on the very much larger associations20 between care home size ..."
- 21 Which is a proxy for all footfall.
- 22 A. Yes.
- Q. Does that mean the bigger it is, the more people arecoming in?
- 25 A. Exactly.

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longer. And the initial questions we wanted to answer in this was to get a more accurate statement on the proportion of care home staff and residents who'd been infected in wave 1 and to do this with blood testing and antibody testing, and this is because we recognised that a very big proportion of people were not tested by PCR.

And so we set out initially to do this study in around 100 care homes that were owned by Four Seasons Health Care and this was serial blood sampling in care home staff and residents to understand who had been infected.

Q. Professor, can I just make sure I understand, and those that are following understand, even though you may not have had a Covid positive test at the time, a blood sample taken later would tell you whether you had the Covid antibodies --

- 17 A. That's right.
- Q. -- and ergo be able to say that even if you didn't have
 the test, we know that you've had Covid; have I got that
 right?
- 21 A. That's exactly right, yes.
- Q. So you were looking at the blood sampling to try and notget round the fact that there was no PCR testing, but
- just to see if we could have different numbers of people
- now with the Covid-19 antibodies?

- 1 A. Yes, that's right.
- 2 Q. And how easy or otherwise was it to obtain samples from
- 3 people in care homes because presumably you need someone
- 4 to go and take the blood sample?
- 5 A. So immensely challenging for lots of reasons but we were
- 6 very fortunate because we worked very closely with the
- 7 care sector on this and we were able to find a way to
- 8 make it work within that setting. So some of the
- 9 challenges are obviously many people in care homes are
- 10 cognitively impaired, conditions like dementia, and so
- 11 informed consent for blood sampling is not
- 12 straightforward and so we had to talk to next of kin or
- 13 nominated consultees, staff members, but we primarily
- 14 worked with next of kin, and to do that we were very
- reliant on staff within those care homes to support that
- 16 process because we couldn't go into care homes as
- 17 a research team because all care homes were locked down
- 18 at that point.
- 19 Q. So you're really reliant on the staff going above and
- 20 beyond to ring next of kin --
- 21 A. Yes.
- 22 Q. -- to say, "Would you mind if I took a blood sample from
- your relative, your loved one?"
- 24 A. Yes, exactly.
- 25 **Q.** And are you able to give us a sense of if there was any
- 1 the blood testing in the residents to PCR test results
 - where they were available, and you wanted to link it to
- 3 NHS datasets that were held in the NHS Foundry. How
- 4 easy or otherwise was it to be able to make those
- 5 linkages?

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- 6 A. So there were two barriers. So the first is, if you
- 7 want to do those linkages, you have to have an
 - identifier, you have to have the NHS number, and lots of
- 9 carer provider organisations don't hold that
- 10 information. Most of them do now but pre-pandemic they
- 11 didn't. And so there were real challenges around how
- 12 you get accurate identifiers, and then there's the
- 13 challenge of data linkage and that really is about
- 14 putting the datasets in the same location, and having
- the permissions in governance around that, and
- subsequent changes with the COPI notice that I imagine
- we'll come on to, it enabled us to find a way round that
- that was much more effective longer term.
- 19 LADY HALLETT: Professor, sorry to interrupt, how long do20 antibodies stay in the blood?
- 21 A. How long do they stay for? It depends. So we could be
- confident we would have them for four to five months.
- 23 LADY HALLETT: Thank you.
- 24 MS CAREY: So we're conducting this study, it started in

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25 May, I think, it was, so it would still capture people

- 1 resistance from the care home staff in the instance?
- 2 Secondly, was there any resistance from next of kin to
- 3 participating in the study?
- 4 A. So we were really fortunate because right at the
- 5 beginning of the study we spoke to the Minister for
- 6 Social Care and had a meeting with her. I met with her,
- 7 and the chief executive of Four Seasons Healthcare, and
- 8 we talked about the study, we talked about why it was so
- 9 important, but we also highlighted that this was going
- 10 to create additional workload for staff and so we had
- that organisational buy-in and they were hugely
- supportive and we were able to fund people to act as
- 13 project managers within their organisations.
- So actually, we didn't really encounter resistance.
- 15 It was -- I think everybody understood why this was
- important, and it was very much a shared endeavour.
- 17 I cannot speak to what it was like being a frontline
- 18 carer trying to negotiate that, but that was the
- 19 feedback that we had, and people wanted to know their
- 20 results, which also helped a lot --
- 21 Q. Yes. Notwithstanding that it added to the burden of the
- 22 workload on the staff --
- 23 A. Yes.
- 24 $\,$ Q. $\,$ -- I think you said that there was a further challenge
- 25 not just on them but you wanted to link the results of
- 1 who were discharged in March.
- 2 A. Yes
- 3 Q. Yes. In fact, it would go back almost to the beginning
- 4 of the 2020.
- 5 A. I think our biggest challenge is that not everybody
- 6 survived to be available, so again, we have the
- 7 underestimation problem. And there is variability in
- 8 the duration of antibodies as well.
- 9 Q. Right. So there's those two caveats to apply to the
- 10 cohort study --
- 11 **A.** Yes.
- 12 Q. -- as well. You mentioned there COPI notices, Control
- 13 of Patient Information, which essentially provides
- 14 a legal basis for research teams to access data. How
- valuable was it to have the COPI notices in place to
- 16 enable the access to that data?
- 17 A. Incredibly valuable. So it changed us from being
- a study where we could only include care home residents
- 19 who had consented to blood sampling, which was very
- 20 challenging for the reasons we've just discussed, to
- 21 being able to collect data on everybody in those care
- 22 homes, so all staff and all residents. So that took us
- 23 from a study of the sort of order of magnitude of
- thousands, to ultimately we had over 70,000 care home
- 25 residents and staff in our study. And clearly the power

- of our analyses and conclusions is much greater if we're 2 able to enrol many more people.
 - Q. Can we look, please, then, at the key findings from the Vivaldi cohort study and your paragraph, I think, 44 is where it starts, Professor.

And it might be useful if we could call it up on screen. It's INQ000613177_021.

Thank you.

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The cohort study alongside the survey was to get an accurate estimate of the proportion of surviving staff and residents who'd been infected, based on the antibodies, and you wanted to be able to track what happened to the resident staff over successive waves.

I think you explained that although it started out as 100 care homes -- did you say it went to 700?

- 16 Α. So ultimately we had, I think it was, 346.
- 17 Q. 340. Forgive me. Thank you.

Then there was the issues with linking it that we've looked at.

But if we go on to paragraph 45:

"... the first priority in the cohort study was to estimate the proportion of staff and residents who had been infected ... Using ... [the] NHS Foundry and blood samples ... we estimated that 33% of surviving residents and 29% of staff had antibodies showing they had been 189

[the PCR positive infection rates] in residents and care home staff who had evidence of a previous infection up to ten months earlier ... with those who had not ..."

And what did you find, please?

A. So the reason we did this -- so this was before vaccines were available, and one of the key questions was whether people could get Covid more than once. And, you know, how worried did you need to be if you hadn't had it, essentially?

So what we did was we looked at antibody test results referring to wave 1, so people could be positive or negative, and then we looked among those positives and negatives: what was their chance of getting a new infection? And we found that it was very significantly lower in those who had had a prior infection, highlighting that if you'd had it previously, you had immunity.

Obviously that changed with the emergence of variants, but at that point in time that was a really key finding because it did provide some reassurance that there was some protection.

- 22 Q. So effectively if you'd had it and survived, if you were 23 at lower risk of infection?
- 24 A.
- 25 Q. And therefore, help inform policy to look at the places

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infected in the first wave." 1

2 So quite higher numbers than we looked at in the 3 survey.

- 4 A. Yeah
- And would you expect there to be higher numbers --5
- 6 A.
- 7 Q. -- based on the antibody cohort testing?
- 8 Yes, absolutely.
- 9 Q. So that was not a surprise to you?
- 10 It was not. I think we were all surprised at how high
- 11 it was, bearing in mind these were survivors, but we
- 12 absolutely expected it to be higher than the PCR
- 13 testing, because we were very aware that that was very
- 14 limited in the first wave.
- 15 Q. Or to put it another way, it shows you how much of an
- 16 underestimate it was from the survey results?
- 17 A.
- 18 Q. "The estimate for residents was approximately three-fold 19 higher than [in the] ... survey ..."
- 20 You say it's not surprising.
- 21 It shows that many people who were infected in the 22 first wave did not have access to PCR testing ..."
- 23 Then help us, please, really with the next few 24 sentences, Professor. You say:
- 25 "To investigate rates of ... infection, we compared
- 1 where there wasn't that amount of immunity, they might 2 need more protection, if I can put it like that --
- 3 A.
- 4 Q. -- or different forms of protection, but to give you an 5 idea of how many people in care homes might nonetheless
- 6 be protected by the fact they'd had it the first time
- 7 around?
- A. And I think also, importantly, providing some 8
- 9 reassurance to people in the care sector about the risk
- 10 of -- at least if you have had it and survived, then
- 11 potentially your future risk is diminished.
- 12 Now you mentioned just a moment ago, that was before
- 13 there was the variants as they emerged. Can I ask you,
- 14 please, about your paragraph 46. Can you help me with
- 15 what Vivaldi found in relation to I think it was the
- 16 Alpha variant that emerged in the autumn of 2020?
- 17 A. Yes, so -- and this is a really good example of why data 18 and data linkage was so important.

So what we were able to show is that, as this 19 20 variant emerged, because of a peculiarity about how the 21 PCR testing worked, we were able to track the emergence

- 22 of this variant across the south east of England, and 23 there was good data on how it had spread across in the
- 24 general population, but no data on the care home
- population. The hope at the time was because we had 25

1		a lot of control measures in place, care homes were
2		protected and it wouldn't get in, but we were able to
3		show that the variant had got into care homes, and the
4		potential risks associated with that.
5	Q.	And just finally, I think in due course Vivaldi was
6		asked to look at vaccines against viruses, because there
7		was a concern that Covid vaccines might not provide
8		residents with adequate protection, but what did Vivaldi
9		find when you were able to factor the vaccines in?
10	A.	So there was a lot of concern because, for example, with
11		influenza vaccine, you know, it's less effective in
12		these older age groups. The clinical trials that were
13		done of the vaccines excluded care home residents, so we
14		didn't have any data. We were able to show that the
15		vaccines were actually working very effectively in this
16		population and substantially reducing the risk of
17		infection. And so, again, that provided a lot of early
18		reassurance, and also to support the rollout of uptake
19		of vaccination in that population.
20	Q.	I think it showed that there were vaccines did work,
21		they were effective for three months after dose 2, but
22		thereafter protection declined?
23	A.	Yes.

1 data being referred to during the course of those 2 meetings? 3 A. Yes. So from memory, every week we would have a series 4 of presentations, Vivaldi would present, PHE would also 5 present, and they would present on the outbreak data 6 usually. 7 Right. Did the Vivaldi survey use any PHE data that 8 you're aware of? 9 A. No. Q. What about the Vivaldi cohort study, did that rely on 10 11 any PHE data?

And we saw that pattern repeatedly because we kept doing

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NHSE and PHE.

Q. Is that a fair summary?

So the -- Vivaldi relied, the cohort study relied very 12 A. heavily on the testing data. Testing data was quite 13 14 complex because there were different routes, they were 15 called pillars, and from memory, Pillar 1 was largely 16 PHE led, data collection, and this included the testing, 17 the five samples per care home that they used at the 18 beginning. But then there was mass testing, which 19 I believe, was Pillar 2, and so a lot of the data we 20 used initially was Pillar 2. Over the time, we also got 21 access to Pillar 1 data. So we will have had some 22 tested data, I think, via PHE. 23 We also had access to datasets like the national

immunisations dataset which I believe is jointly held by

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1 these kinds of studies. So we saw, after booster 2 vaccinations, within a period of approximately 3 three months, you start to see that waning, hence the 4 need for boosters. And so our data was also useful for 5 the Joint Commission on Vaccination and Immunisations 6 when trying to think about the timing and need for 7 boosters in this population. 8 MS CAREY: My Lady, a lot of data there, a lot to take in. 9 Would that be a convenient moment? 10 LADY HALLETT: Yes, it is, and I think the stenographer had 11 quite a tough morning. MS CAREY: Yes, I appreciate that, I'm sorry. 12 LADY HALLETT: If you'll forgive us, we will take a break. 13 I promise you we will finish your evidence this 14 15 afternoon. I shall return at 3.40. 16 MS CAREY: Thank you, my Lady. 17 (3.26 pm) 18 (A short break) 19 (3.40 pm) 20 LADY HALLETT: Ms Carey. 21 MS CAREY: Thank you, my Lady. 22 Professor, you told us earlier this afternoon that 23 the data was shared both with the DHSC debrief group and 24 the Social Care Working Group. And during your time at

1 Right. I will tell you why I ask, Professor. There is 2 some evidence before the Inquiry that the quality of PHE 3 data was lacking. Two things: firstly, whether you 4 experience that; but secondly, if that is right whether 5 that in any way affects the Vivaldi cohort study 6 findings. Can I deal with that firstly. 7

Did you, when you were in the meetings, look at the PHE data and come to realise it had some limitations to it, and if so, what were then?

the Social Care Working Group meetings, did you see PHE

A. So is this thinking of this as separate to Vivaldi? 10

11 Q. Yes, separate to Vivaldi.

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So I think the challenge with outbreak data is that it's 12 13 based on reporting of outbreaks which is largely care 14 homes reporting outbreaks into PHE or UKHSA, and so that 15 is never going to be comprehensive information because 16 it requires somebody to pick up the phone and report

17 data in. This did change during the pandemic to an 18 extent because of the mass testing. But as a mechanism, 19 you are always going to be under-reporting the number of

outbreaks and the number of cases if you're relying on 20

21 a care home to phone in data to a local health

22 protection team.

23 Q. And was that caveat or limitation, call it what you 24 will, well recognised by the people that were in the 25 SAGE Care Home Working Group?

- A. I would say so. I think almost everybody in that group, 1 2 a lot of people in that group, had a public health 3 background and so will have had a familiarity with 4 HPZone, which is the system that's used for that.
- 5 Q. Right.

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- 6 A. Just on some of the other datasets, so on the 7 vaccinations dataset, there was never any suggestion 8 that the quality of that data wasn't pretty good.
- 9 Q. So to go back to the second part of that question, which 10 was: notwithstanding the caveats that have to be applied 11 to the PHE data, do you think that impacts on the 12 validity of the findings of Vivaldi or not, in the 13 cohort study?
- 14 A. No, I don't, because we were -- the innovative thing we 15 were able to do in the cohort study was to use the 16 testing data which linked individuals in a care home to 17 their care home, so we had their NHS number on the swab 18 linked to their Care Quality Commission ID, their care 19 home ID, and that gave us a registry of everybody in 20 a care home and so we knew everybody in the care home, 21 all staff, all residents. So that's the key difference 22 between adopting that approach to define your

population, versus having these care homes phoning in

25 You told us before the break that perhaps at the

about outbreaks.

- 1 One might have got the sense from your evidence, 2 Professor, that there was a great deal of collaboration 3 during the pandemic, expediency and urgency being at the 4 forefront of the mind. Are you able to comment on 5 whether that same sense of collaboration exists now 6 in 2025?
- A. So I think that we don't have the same impetus. So, as you know from the statement, we have a project called 9 the Vivaldi Social Care project that we've been able to 10 set up. We started working on this from around 2021. 11 And it was really recognising that we need to make sure 12 this kind of situation can't unfold again, and what 13 needs to be in place to prevent that.

And I think that we are making great progress towards that, but the priority that it is afforded now versus during the pandemic is different. That's understandable, but I do think that we really do need different organisations to continue working in that same way if we want to make sure we're better prepared for future pandemics and that we have the infrastructure we need to be able to respond in a timely way.

21 22 Q. Now you mentioned the Social Care project. It's at your 23 paragraph 63, for you and anyone else following.

> Just help us though, what is the Social Care project designed to try to achieve? 199

beginning there was a feeling that you might be treading 1 2 on toes a little, to use your phrase, and there were 3 organisations whose job it was to provide the data, and 4 perhaps you were filling a gap that shouldn't have 5 existed. And can I ask you about that answer, please. 6 Which department or organisation was it who should have 7 filled the gaps that Vivaldi stepped into? 8 So I think in an ideal world, obviously we don't live in 9 an ideal world, we would have great surveillance on care 10 homes, and we don't have great surveillance on care 11 homes and that's why the situation unfolded in the way 12 that it did, and why we didn't have the data that we 13 needed. So I think that Vivaldi came in to fill or, at 14 least, partially fill that gap, and perhaps that's not 15 ideal for a public health agency. 16 Q. So really it's UKHSA as it now is, or PHE, as it then 17 was --18 Α. Yes. 19 -- who had responsibility for surveillance of the care 20 21 A. Yes. And what I would say is that we did work 22 collaboratively and that our -- the ability to use that 23 data and work together, I think was very good throughout 24 the pandemic but I think yes, we were filling a gap that

So it's really building on what we learnt about what works in Vivaldi Study. So the reason Vivaldi worked was because it was a partnership between the care sector, academics and policymakers, and because we were able to use routine data. So we really very rapidly recognised that the care sector was under huge pressure. They did not have time to collect data for us. So how can we use routine data to enable better surveillance but also research, the kinds of research we need?

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ideally wouldn't have existed.

So we've worked together since 2023 to codevelop this project called Vivaldi Social Care. We've got 700 care homes that have signed up, or thereabouts, to take part. We've been able to get a new data platform created by NHS England which allows us to have data on residents and link data on residents. And our ambition to is to build on that to start doing studies to reduce the impact of all kinds of infection, but ensuring that we have that agility to respond to new and emerging threats.

Q. I think you say at the bottom of your paragraph 63 20 21 there:

> "... demonstrate the value for care providers and policymakers of ... data by benchmarking rates of infection ..."

So any infection?

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2 Q. "... and hospital admission across care homes."

3 Can you help me about that aspect of the Vivaldi 4 Social Care project?

So it's the similar to the main Vivaldi, to the cohort A. study. So in the cohort study I mentioned we created this registry of care home residents, and what we were able to do was then link to data on vaccinations, hospitalisations, deaths, and there's potential to link to other kinds of datasets. So using that same model, we're able to link to data on hospitalisations in care home residents now, post-Covid, and look at hospitalisations for a whole range of causes.

So it doesn't give us anything that we would like to know by any stretch but it starts to give you a sense of what's happening in that population, where the priorities might lie, and a huge potential for surveillance but also for policy and planning moving forward.

- 20 Q. I think you say in your statement you anticipate sharing 21 the first set of results, I think in September 2005, or 22 is that perhaps now a bit later than September?
- 23 A. Yes, yes. We've had some challenges with our data 24 linkage with NHS England, but I -- yes, this year.
- 25 Q. Can I go back, please, and perhaps to a wider point that

1 off-putting, so there's a whole language and cultural 2 change around this that we need if we want to start 3 delivering the kind of research that we need to see in 4 this setting and that people in the setting want to do.

Q. If you're able, and it's not an impossible question to answer, who or how do we go about changing that culture? Is it training? Is there a department or a body that might be able to promote it? Can you help at all with how we might ameliorate that position?

A. Yes, so the National Institute for Health and Care 10 11 Research has a big focus on trying to support more

12 research in social care. I think it's partly about 13 trying to understand what the barriers are and

recognising that it's not the same as the NHS, and so

this is about partnership working, so we're trying to work towards research that is led by social care. It

can't be academics like me marching in and saying, "This

is what we should do." You know, it's the wrong way round.

So a lot of it is about understanding the setting, partnership working, and then providing that training and capacity building, and providing the financial resource and incentive so that people have their time bought out so they can participate in research studies.

You make the observation in your paragraph 53 that Q. 203

you make in your statement, that you say that there is no established culture of research in care homes. Can you help us with what impediment or otherwise that was during the pandemic and whether, if at all, that has changed now?

A. So I think the starting point here is research is part of the NHS Constitution, so it's expected that this will happen in hospitals.

In social care, because social care is not one organisation, it's a much, much bigger challenge, and so there is not the same familiarity with research, and there aren't people who are funded to support the delivery of research. And so it's not reasonable to expect people to add in a huge amount of extra work to their jobs when they're already overstretched, to take on the delivery and design of research studies.

So we need to overcome that problem by funding people to do the research, but also we need to provide the training and capacity building for staff in those care homes.

And this really -- some of this is not -- is quite simple stuff. Even terms like the word "research", this doesn't mean the same thing to everybody. In the NHS this is understood to an extent but in social care some of these words are potentially really intimidating and 202

1 a major barrier to the research was the inability to 2 reliably identify care home residents or staff in the 3 datasets because there is no national registry of 4 residents and staff. Why was that such an impediment?

5 A. So if you can't -- I think one thing that became really obvious to me in Vivaldi quickly was the power of statistics. So you have to be able to measure things to 8 highlight where issues lie, and to be able to get investment and support to it, to address those 10 challenges. And in the care sector we don't have -- or 11 in care homes we don't have a registry of care home 12 residents or staff.

> So if you want to look at things like, say, you wanted to say how many people aged over 65 have gone into hospital for flu. You can look at our hospital episodes statistics data, a routine dataset that exists, and you can get the answer to that question, but if you want to ask the same question for care home residents, you can't, because you can't work out which records relate to care home residents.

And this just seems like such an important barrier. We don't even have a registry of the population. So it's not that surprising that when a crisis like Covid hits, we're not able to quickly get the answers to the questions about that population and what's happening to 204

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2	Q.	You say we need a new way to develop and maintain a care
3		home registry. Do you have any views about who should
4		maintain that registry and how easily or otherwise it

be able to inform policymaking

maintain that registry and how easily or otherwise it

5 might be maintained?

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A. I think it has to be held as a central resource and as national data infrastructure, because it's not a research study. It's something that would have value across so many different settings. It would be valuable for surveillance, it would be valuable for policy planning, commissioning. It's also valuable for research. So it feels like something that it's fairly fundamental.

But I think this also speaks as to sort of a bigger question about vulnerable populations and how you make the most vulnerable people in society visible, and we have so many challenges around this.

So we spoke about the COPI notice, but now the COPI notice is no longer. If we want to do this kind of work in care homes we have to have approval from the Health Research Authority Confidentiality Advisory Group. To do that, you that have to make the case for why you can use data without consent from this population.

And the way that's assessed is by demonstrating the population support it. But of course in a vulnerable 205

because sometimes if you start detecting infections for which there is no treatment, you can sometimes create more work and more problems, and certainly one thing -another thing we learnt in Covid was around the balance of risk and harms of isolating people, quality of life, making sure care homes remain open to visitors, and so forth.

So I do think we need more work in that area but I think it needs to be looking at it not just from a health perspective but also from a social care perspective, so you're considering benefits and harms, but definitely from the resident and the family perspective, not just health.

14 MS CAREY: Professor, those are all the questions I ask 15 before -- I know there are some Core Participant 16 questions --

17 LADY HALLETT: Yes, just before Mr Weatherby asks 18 a question. You've described the Vivaldi project and the data. When you talk about the data, are we talking 19 20 English data?

21 A. Yes

LADY HALLETT: Do you know whether some of the principles 22 23 you've described apply to the devolved nations or is 24 that beyond your expertise?

A. I know a little about these, so the data infrastructure 25 207

population who lack capacity, that is immensely difficult. So what you're actually doing is taking a vulnerable population and then making it really, really difficult to have data on them, so that they then become more invisible.

And I think there are some real challenges around this, about advocating for these kinds of populations.

Q. They will be questions for the DHSC and the UKHSA.

Can I just finally ask you this, please, Professor: obviously we looked at, earlier, the diagram showing all the various routes of ingress into care homes, and you've explained, I think clearly, how very difficult it would be to work out which of them was the most dominant route, but do you think there needs to be any research done on any particular one of the number of seven routes in that would help in the event of a future pandemic?

A. I think there's a lot of discussion about how we might use point-of-care testing, so lateral flow devices, these kind of tests, in an effective way. And you could envisage a scenario where these are used more widely in care homes, potentially to test staff, potentially to test residents, or even to test visitors. So I think there is definitely the scope to do quite a lot of work in that area.

> There are some real challenges around it, though, 206

is very different in each of the devolved nations. 2 Certainly in Wales they have the SAIL dataset where a lot of the linkages are already in place. In Scotland they have different issues. I don't think any of the nations have solved the problem of how you identify care home residents and do all these linkages, but ...

7 LADY HALLETT: So some of the principles you have expressed 8 would apply around the devolved nations although they might have slightly different problems or challenges? 9

A. I think that's right. I think they would apply to an 10 11 extent but in different ways.

12 LADY HALLETT: Yes. Thank you.

Sorry, Mr Weatherby.

Questions from MR WEATHERBY KC

15 MR WEATHERBY: Not at all.

> I think in fact, Professor, you've covered all of the questions that I was going to ask you but there's one point I just want to clarify, just to make sure that I've understood it.

And Ms Carey took you to your paragraph 9, where you said that there are no systems which routinely monitor infections or hospital admissions in individual care home residents or staff. Have I understood your evidence to date correctly that that has been addressed, but there is still no ongoing systems to make sure that 208

- 1 that happens?
- 2 A. So it was addressed during the pandemic --
- 3 Q. Yes.
- 4 A. -- but now, if we wanted to measure cases of influenza,
- 5 for example, in care home residents, we couldn't do
- 6 that.
- 7 Q. You couldn't. So is that something that you would 8 invite the Inquiry to address in recommendations?
- 9 A. Yes, and that's something that we're trying to address,
- 10 albeit in a smallish way in the Vivaldi social care 11
- 12 Q. In the social care project. That's what I'd understood.
- 13 Just finally on that, would one way of doing it be
- 14 to make it a regulatory requirement through the CQC?
- A. I think the challenge is it's this difference between 15
- 16 having data at care home level versus the individual
- 17 level data. So there are systems like Capacity Tracker
- 18 which collect data direct from the care homes on things
- 19 like the total number of people who have been
- 20 vaccinated, and that's very helpful, but if you have
- 21 a pandemic and you want to know how well is the vaccine
- 22 working --
- 23 Q. Yes.

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- 24 A. -- ideally, you need to be able to track individuals.
- 25 You get vaccinated, do you get infections? And that's 209

1 want to know who is in a care home on a given day. It's

- just that denominator, because if you know that then you
- 3 can link to other routine datasets like hospital
- 4 admissions, like vaccinations, ideally primary care
- 5 data. But that's your starting point, and we've
- 6 approached it in this way because we want to build
- 7 trust, we don't want to go too fast, we want to
 - demonstrate the value of doing this to the care sector,
- 9 but beyond that, there is huge scope to pull in all
- 10 different kinds of data. I'm particularly thinking
 - about quality of life data, which we know is so
- 12 important, but is actually really hard to get.

13 There would need to be work to think about how you 14 record that, how you have the capacity to record that

- across lots of residents, but ideally, you record that
- 16 annually or every six months and you're able to pull
- 17 that into your electronic care records and then that
- 18 becomes part of your centralised data collection.
- 19 So I think there is huge scope for us to use routine 20 data to really fill in this gap and with a lot of the
- 21 advance -- recent advances in data science, particularly
- 22 ChatGPT, large language models, there are ways that we
- 23 will be able to start pulling data from care records
- 24 that doesn't require lots of additional work from care 25
 - home staff themselves.

the kind of data we don't have at the moment because we can't identify those care home residents in routine

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4 MR WEATHERBY: I see. Thank you very much indeed.

LADY HALLETT: Thank you, Mr Weatherby. 5

Ms Jones. Over that way.

Questions from MS JESSICA JONES

MS JONES: My Lady. 8

> Professor Shallcross, you have also answered most of what I was going to ask you about today, as well, but just to follow on from the points you made in your evidence about the lack of pre-existing data that you found about care homes, the lack of data linkage and the gaps that you described Vivaldi as filling, including the need, as you see it, for a centralised database of information about those who live and work in care homes, can you help us at all with what kind of data about those people a centralised database would need to

20 policy making on the experiences and support that people 21 in care homes require?

22 A. Yes, so I think at the start this could be extremely 23 limited. So what we've been doing in the Vivaldi social 24 care project is just the NHS number and the care home ID

contain in order to be useful for future research and

25 and the reason we're doing that is because we simply 210

So yeah, I think it could be very simple, initially.

- 2 Q. Thank you. When you refer to quality of life data, can 3 you help us understand precisely what you mean by that?
- 4 Yes. This is not my area but colleagues of mine have
- 5 done a lot of work looking at social care-related
- 6 quality of life, so measures that you can use to assess
- 7 quality of life in care home residents. There have been
- 8 some projects, there's a study called DACHA that looked
- at this I think in around 60 care homes, and so it is 9 10
- collecting that data and then making modifications to 11 the digital care records so that it gets recorded in
- 12
- those care plans and then if it's in there, using
- 13 mechanisms like we're using in Vivaldi social care, you
- 14 can then pull that into your centralised data collection
- 15 and that could be used for a variety of purposes. 16 So there are existing tools to measure that. The
- 17 challenge is you need a workforce who have time to be 18 able to go and do those measures on residents and it
- 19 needs to get recorded in the care records so we can pull
- 20 it out at the other end.
- 21 Thank you. And finally, I know your experience with 22 Vivaldi was with through care homes specifically.
- 23 A. Yes.
- 24 But you, of course, know and recognise that the care
- 25 sector is much wider than that. Do you have any

1		insights about the collection of data and how that could	1	a financial hit.
2		usefully be done or centralised in respect of people in	2	THE WITNESS: No.
3		other kinds of settings or who receive care at home?	3	LADY HALLETT: But we were very fortunate the number of
4	A.	Yeah, so I should apologise also because I'm sure I have	4	universities who were prepared to take the hit at the
5		referred to "social care" when I should have said "care	5	beginning and allow their academics like you to give us
6		homes" throughout this afternoon.	6	your expertise, so thank you very much indeed.
7		I think some of the principles could apply. I think	7	THE WITNESS: Thank you.
8		particularly if a domiciliary care digital care	8	LADY HALLETT: And thank you for helping the Inquiry. It
9		records are used across domiciliary care, and so that is	9	has been a really interesting afternoon. I'm not that
10		potentially a way into improving our understanding of	10	good with data sometimes but you made it seem extremely
11		that sector. How comprehensive the kinds of data that	11	interesting. Thank you very much.
12		are in those systems, I really don't know, but I do	12	I shall return for 10.00 tomorrow.
13		think as a principle, the idea of using routine data as	13	MS CAREY: My Lady.
14		the way in is something that should be explored across	14	(4.05 pm)
15		domiciliary care as well.	15	(The hearing concluded until 10.00 am the following day)
16	MS	JONES: Thank you very much.	16	
17	LAI	DY HALLETT: Thank you, Ms Jones.	17	
18		That completes all the questions we have for you,	18	
19		professor. Vivaldi has been an extraordinarily	19	
20		worthwhile project, so thank you for all that you've	20	
21		done and are continuing to do, and thank you also to	21	
22		your university for taking the financial hit at the	22	
23		beginning.	23	
24	THI	E WITNESS: Thank you.	24	
25	LAI	DY HALLETT: I hope they haven't had to continue taking	25	
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