

Our Ref: MF/BD

28 March 2022

Ms Christina Rees, MP
Chair
All-Party Parliamentary Group on Vegetarianism and Veganism
c/o Vegetarian for Life
83 Ducie Street
Manchester
M1 2JQ

Dear Ms Rees,

APPG Inquiry Report: Respect for religious and philosophical beliefs while eating in care

Many thanks for your letter dated 2 March 2022 regarding the APPG Inquiry Report “Respect for religious and philosophical beliefs while eating in care”.

I note your reference and recommendation in relation to RQIA’s Provider Guidance, particularly that part relating to Nutrition. I can advise that all of the indicators within RQIA guidance are based on specific regulations, legislation and published standards.

The Nursing Home Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 and The Residential Care Homes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 and associated Department of Health care standards provide the framework to uphold care home resident’s individual and human rights, including their dietary choices. Regulation 12 (4) requires the care home to ensure that food and fluids are provided in adequate quantities and at appropriate intervals; are properly prepared, wholesome and nutritious and meets the resident’s nutritional requirements; are suitable for the needs of residents; provide choice for the residents; and that the menu is varied at suitable intervals. Regulation 13 (8) requires the care home to respects the privacy and dignity of patients and afford due regard to the sex, religious persuasion, ethnic origin, and cultural and linguistic background and any disability of patients.

The Care Standards for Nursing Homes (Department of Health, 2015) standard 12 states: “Residents are provided with a nutritious and varied diet, which meets their individual dietary needs, preferences and religious or cultural requirements.” So there exists quite comprehensive guidance in this regard.

RQIA, 7th Floor
Victoria House
15-27 Gloucester Street
Belfast BT1 4LS

Tel 028 9536 1111
Email info@rqia.org.uk
Web www.rqia.org.uk
Twitter @RQIANews

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During RQIA's inspections we do examine the arrangements in place in catering areas and observe meals and meal time to ensure that these regulatory requirements are met, and that every resident's personal choices and preferences are respected. Where this is found not to be the case we will highlight this and identify areas for improvement with the provider.

RQIA's Provider Guidance (Indicator E1: The service responds appropriately to and meets the assessed needs of the people who use the service) includes the following Example of evidence: "Nutrition: A nutritious and varied diet is provided which meets each patient's needs and preferences." At present, we are preparing to update our Guidance and I assure you that RQIA will fully consider the APPG's recommendations when updating this particular Provider Guidance for nursing and residential care homes, both the point about preferences and about display of information.

I do note your point about staff and your recommendation relating to mandatory qualifications. RQIA as Northern Ireland's health and social care regulator is not responsible for the regulation of staff, as this is the role of relevant professional regulators including the NMC and NI Social Care Council. However, as part of our inspections we assess staff knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities under the relevant legislation and guidance. I trust this is helpful by way of understanding our role.

We have also shared your letter and our response to the Department of Health, which is responsible for the development of legislation and care standards on this area, for their information.

Yours sincerely,



Briega Donaghy
Chief Executive

cc: Elaine Connolly, RQIA Director of Adult Care Services
Noel Irwin, Department of Health, Care Homes Unit