

**EXCLUSIVE**  
By **Giles Sheldrick**  
Chief Reporter

GILLIAN Keegan has been told to end the "cold war" that still prevents families seeing loved ones in care homes after almost two years.

A week after the care minister ordered them to open up, thousands of relatives are still denied access.

In one disturbing case a blind 102-year-old former nurse has not been able to see her daughter because her home refuses to recognise her as an Essential Care Giver.

Both are now on antidepressants. Ms Keegan told the Express last week every resident is entitled to an ECG, saying: "Seeing a loved one is not just nice but essential, as the name suggests."

Last night a coalition of campaigners demanded she attend a showdown meeting on March 9.

In a joint letter, seen by the Express, Rights for Residents, John's Campaign and Relatives & Residents Association echoed former US President Ronald Reagan's 1987 speech to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev urging him to knock down the Berlin Wall.

**Enemy**

It says: "Please join us in tearing down the wall that has built up between the Government, families and residents. Relatives are not the enemy or the problem - they deserve to be part of the solution."

They want Ms Keegan to attend the showdown Commons talks, where affected relatives, including actress Ruthie Henshall, will meet MPs in a bid to find a solution.

Jenny Morrison and Diane Mayhew, co-founders of Rights for Residents, said: "Families are reaching out for help on behalf of their loved ones whose voices can't be heard."

"It would mean so much if she could work with them to find a solution that would finally restore the human rights of those living in care."

Twice in the past week this newspaper has asked the Department

**Facing calls...**  
**Gillian Keegan**



# Bid to 'tear down the wall' that bars loved ones at care homes



**Horrific state... Hilda Drake and daughter Lynn, inset**

## She's like a prisoner and just wants to die

By **Giles Sheldrick**

ONE of Britain's oldest care home residents has been denied family visits for more than one month as the Covid access scandal continues.

Exactly a week after Care Minister Gillian Keegan said bans "should never happen" 102-year-old Hilda Drake remains isolated, alone and on antidepressants.

Last night her devastated daughter Lynn Embleton laid bare the mental and physical toll both are suffering.

**Dose**

She said: "My head is so full of worry I can't do anything. I just cry so much. It's the last thing I think about at night and the first thing in the morning."

"I am taking a double dose of antidepressants and so is my Mum. It's appalling. I haven't turned to alcohol yet, although there are days I open a bottle of wine or pour vodka."

Hilda has been in a home in Worksop, Notts, for two years. In the same home is her son, Kenneth Hall, 78, who has learning difficulties. Hilda, who worked as a nurse in Tooting, South London, is

registered blind and suffers hallucinations with Charles Bonnet syndrome.

Her first husband Charles died in 1944 aged 31. On the day of his funeral she was bombed out of her house Earlswood, Surrey.

Her second husband - Lynn's father - Albert died in 2007. Hilda's twin Nancy died in 2002, aged 82. She still "talks to her in films" that play in her mind.

Lynn, 72, a former specialist in mental health, said: "Mum she cries a lot and gets very upset. The manager tried to tell me it's when she comes off the phone to me, trying to shift the blame. She's in a horrific state."

She added: "The company refuses to give me, and everyone else, ECG status, saying the insurance won't cover them. I last saw Mum on January 2. I missed her 102nd birthday on December 23, Christmas and New Year."

"Mum says she's in prison and wants to die. It's so hard to hear that from your own mother. I feel that I will never get any meaningful time with her again."

of Health and Social Care to tell us how many homes ban visiting.

It said it has the data but refuses to release it. Helen Wildbore, director of the

Relatives & Residents Association, said: "Two years after Covid first arrived on our shores, people living in care are still paying the price for the Government's mishandling of the pandemic."

"Leaving behind older people who don't know how much time

they have left in this world is heart-breaking."

Since March all care home residents have had the right to nominate individuals for access, provided the ECG is Covid-free. But tens of thousands say they are still refused.

Care homes refusing to grant

Essential Care Giver status face no sanctions but in some cases have threatened residents and families with eviction if challenged.

Ms Keegan said: "In the majority of cases this is not happening but I can't ignore the fact some are not being able to see loved ones."

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