

EXCLUSIVE
By **Giles Sheldrick**
Chief Reporter

RUTHIE Henshall last night begged MPs to finally end the care homes visiting scandal, saying: "How many more have to die of loneliness?"

The actress turned activist wants Parliament to wrestle back control of access rights for care homes and hospitals.

Her comments follow claims many institutions are still refusing to let families see dying loved ones.

Almost 1,000 days since the start of the pandemic, the first Commons debate on the row is due to take place this week.

Rights for Residents ambassador Ruthie's mum Gloria died of dementia aged 88 in a care home during lockdown.

The stage star raged: "My mother had spent a year on her own in her room, 24 hours a day, seven days a week with the occasional visit from an overworked carer."

"Why is this still happening? I waved and shouted through her window for a year until I fought to get in. During the first four months of lockdown she stopped speaking, walking and eating properly. Without love she gave up. She felt abandoned."

Ignored

Ruthie, 55, added: "There are thousands of people in care still having restricted visits by their loved ones, still dying of loneliness."

"I am devastated that basic human rights are being ignored."

"How many more in care have to die in this barbaric way before the Government takes action?"

At the end of March, Covid restrictions on visiting in care settings in England were lifted, unless there were infection prevention measures in new outbreaks.

In that event, guidance says residents can have one visitor at a time, and this does not need to be the same person.

However, 60 per cent of families quizzed by Rights for Residents claimed additional restrictions were put in place. One in three said contact was strictly limited to a single named visitor.

Some 45 per cent accused homes of continuing to impose blanket restrictions outside of outbreaks, contrary to guidance.

A Commons debate on Thursday will attempt to break the deadlock.

The two-and-a-half year grassroots fight for unrestricted access to

Pictures: STEVE REIGATE

Ruthie: How many more have to die?

Care homes still blocking visits by loved ones



March for care... Ruthie, centre, with fellow campaigners Diane Mayhew, right, and Jenny Morrison in Downing Street last year

homes and hospital wards has exposed deep failings in the implementation of guidance.

Last year, Ruthie led thousands of families in a march on No 10 demanding urgent intervention.

Since then distraught families have told how the use of separation and isolation to control infections has inflicted unimaginable pain and suffering, particularly on the elderly and vulnerable.

They claim pleas for action have

been ignored and only new laws will safeguard their rights.

Campaigners want a legal right to maintain contact with loved ones across all health and care settings.

Helen Wildbore, director of The Relatives & Residents Association, said: "MPs must now send a message loud and clear to the Government that never again should people who need care be isolated from those most important in their lives. For the sake of all

those who died alone, those who thought they'd been abandoned, those who simply gave up the will to live, we must urgently enshrine the role of care supporter in law and end the terrible harm of isolation."

The Care Quality Commission watchdog said it was powerless to act on visiting arrangements while the Department for Health and Social Care has refused to legally mandate access rights.



Isolated...Hilda Drake, 102

TOLL LEFT HILDA, 102, ON ANTIDEPRESSANTS

FEW cases highlighted the care homes access scandal more than that of Hilda Drake, 102, who was consistently denied family visits.

In February, a week after ex-Care Minister Gillian Keegan said bans "should never happen"

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Hilda was left isolated. It led daughter Lynn Embleton to say: "My head is so full of worry."

"I cry so much. It's the last thing I think about at night and the first thing I think about in the

morning. I am taking a double dose of antidepressants and so is Mum. It's appalling."

Thousands of families have told similar stories, laying bare the toll of separation. But two-and-a-half years on, no action has been taken.

COMMENT

JENNY MORRISON and DIANE MAYHEW
Co-founders Rights for Residents

THE shocking abuse of power on the part of some care companies uncovered in our latest survey underlines the urgent need for the rights of residents to be legally upheld.

Lawmakers must ensure those in care homes and hospitals have a legal right to at least one essential care supporter that can visit them in all circumstances.

Some 35 organisations and national charities have signed up to support our call.

MPs will press Ministers to amend health and care regulations that would be a step towards ending isolation in care. Isolation kills and lessons need to be learned. We don't need to wait for a Covid inquiry to tell us that.

Families have been forced to stand aside and witness the devastating effects that isolation has had on their loved ones throughout the pandemic.

Confused

Many simply gave up the will to live. We witnessed the rapid and devastating decline of our own mum in the first months of lockdown and will be forever haunted by the sight of her, distressed and confused, at the other side of a window.

Families are not just visitors, they are the eyes, ears and voices of those that can't be heard and they provide a vital component of care that cannot be replicated by paid carers, no matter how wonderful they are.

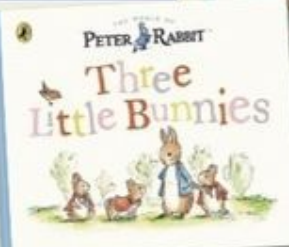
During an outbreak 60 per cent of relatives said their care home imposed additional restrictions to those advised by the DHSC. A third were limited to one named visitor and one in five residents was isolated and confined to his or her room.

One in seven was prevented from making any visits. Perhaps the most alarming finding was that in 11 per cent of cases, residents were denied any visits at all during the outbreak. Clearly, many are at the mercy of care providers that refuse to prioritise their mental health and well-being.

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