

THE CHRISTMAS tree lights are twinkling, and the decorations are delightful. Nothing could be more festive than the atmosphere in our Springdene homes at the moment. After this horrendous year we're all in the mood for celebration.

And there can be no better present than the prospect of getting vaccinated against Covid-19, which is rated as a top priority for residents of care homes. As you will know, the first of a number of potential vaccines – developed by Pfizer BioNTech – has passed regulatory approval and the initial vaccinations were carried out in hospitals this week.

We haven't yet been informed directly when the vaccine will come to us, but Professor Stephen Powis, the national medical director for NHS England, told the BBC *Today* programme that it may be ready to go into care homes by Christmas. This is thanks to a new technique developed to split the current large consignments into smaller, transportable batches.

We await further information, so please don't ring our busy home managers for the time being. We'll let you know as soon as we know. Meanwhile, our staff have been informed their vaccinations will go ahead and we're getting all the necessary information together for the vaccination of residents to take place – so we are ready.

Unfortunately, the news about visiting is more problematic. As you know already, the government had promised to supply rapid (lateral flow) tests to allow relatives access to the homes to visit loved ones. People would take a test and wait up to 30 minutes for the result. So long as they tested negative, they would be able to meet up with loved ones inside the home face to face.

However, since ministers published their plans last week, new evidence about the reliability of these lateral flow tests has emerged, showing that in some instances they are only 50 per cent effective in picking up positive cases of Covid-19. This has meant that some authorities, including Greater Manchester, Liverpool and Sheffield, have advised against their use in care homes. Many individual homes throughout England are also choosing not to use them.

The clinical team at Springdene have carefully reviewed the evidence, including that from the recent mass testing in Liverpool, where rapid tests identified only half of positive cases. We have reluctantly come to the conclusion that in the light of this we cannot risk introducing infection into the homes – especially as we have come on such a long journey over the past months to make them Covid-free. We are sorry if this is disappointing, but we promise to keep the situation under review.

Meanwhile visiting continues in our heated gazebos, where a face-to-face rendezvous with your loved ones is possible, albeit with masks and social distancing – and no tests are necessary. Do book an appointment – there are slots available.

On a cheerier note, residents are enjoying a fantastic festive programme developed by our activities staff, as well as more live-streamed events. We were delighted to welcome back our friends from the Wallace Collection, who have entertained us so brilliantly over the years. Their live talk about the world-renowned collection of Old Masters in the gallery was fascinating.



The seasonal theme is at the heart of many of our events all the way through to New Year. At Spring Grove, this week we've been holding festive choir practice, with renderings of some of the great Christmas and winter songs. We've had Christmas Jumper Day, with folk seeing how well they can do at festive volleyball with a woolly jumper and hat on. On Saturday our very own Odile will be at the ivories, playing Christmas favourites. In the meantime, everyone's looking forward to our fabulous Hannukah party next Tuesday. Dreidels at the ready!

At Springview, folk were making delicious mince pies and a gingerbread house as well as doing festive arts and crafts. And it was eyes down for a great Christmas Casino Afternoon, with Steve as croupier. Film time was delightfully seasonal, with showings of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, and *The Snowman and the Snowdog*.

On Saturday there will be a special treat with local pantomime actors performing carols in the car park, while on Sunday the Salvation Army band will come to play. (The Queen had a Salvation Army band play for her at Windsor this week!)

Among the highlights at Spring Lane were circus artists performing through the windows and a Zoom "Carols by Candlelight" which relatives were invited to join. In fact, Zoom entertainments have become all the rage in the homes, bringing in the spice and spontaneity of live performance.

This week we've had live events from humorous entertainer Dave Williams, known as "One Man Banned", as well as a session from Mirthy Talks, with a feast of anecdotes and music on a seasonal theme. There were Christmas songs from the Golden Age of Hollywood musicals combined with tales about the artists and an exploration of the origins of some of our favourite Christmas traditions.

As always, music is at the heart of things, and we had a fabulous treat from our Artists 'n' Residents musicians. We have to thank Ryan Quigley and Friends for a great live jazz session. Ryan is one of the most in-demand jazz trumpet players in the UK and had everybody tapping their feet. Next week we are looking forward to a second visit from Jo Withers on horn with pianist Leo Nicholson, who will play some Christmas-themed tunes. You can tune in and join us by clicking here www.artistsandresidents.org



Relishing all the fun were our residents of the week – Mary Kelly at Spring Lane, June Parker at Springview and Linda Dean at Spring Grove. Mary is a fantastic cook and loves the jive, while June was a long-standing member of the Salvation Army. Linda, a former vicar, is a keen singer and is a big fan of Benjamin Britten. Also at Spring Grove Dr Marcelle Jay had a splendid 90th birthday celebration (above), with a huge pink-iced birthday cake. Many happy returns, Marcelle!

Lastly, Springview have been raising money for our favourite charity – Medical Detection Dogs – which does so much good work in identifying disease, including Covid-19. Our manager Tamas nobly volunteered to be part of an auction to have his beard tinted before being cut off, which raised more than £160 for the charity. It was hilarious, with laughter all round (see below)!



And there are still tickets available for the legendary Christmas raffle, also in aid of Medical Detection Dogs, organised by reception manager Kathy. The prizes feature hampers containing a cornucopia of goodies, including wine, beer, crackers and chocolates. Tickets cost just £1 each and can be bought by visitors to the home or by ringing 020 8367 9966. We're sure you'll dig deep.

Stay safe and stay well!

Jeremy Balcombe
CEO Springdene Group
