

27 March 2020



Important notice for patients and families

St Catherine's Hospice, along with hospitals and care homes must protect the lives of patients, family members and clinical staff during this devastating pandemic. COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease that, in 3 months, has reached almost every country in the world and taken over 23,000 lives.

Such is the international concern for the infectious and lethal nature of this virus that borders have been closed, businesses shut down and in some countries, weddings, baptisms and even funerals have been banned.

Any person coming into the unit can bring the virus with them even if they are not showing any symptoms. No matter how hard people try, the virus has a remarkable capability to travel through the air and live on surfaces and clothes for quite some time. In Italian hospitals, despite the strictest infection control procedures available, clinicians caring for patients have been infected. Any patient who is admitted to St Catherine's Inpatient Unit will have serious underlying medical conditions and is at great risk if the virus reaches them.

It is in the light of this extremely dangerous situation that we have had to make a very difficult decision.

To protect patients and staff at St Catherine's Hospice from Coronavirus, patients may no longer be visited.

The only exception to this is when doctors have concluded that a patient is in the last hours of their life, in which case, one adult may visit between 1pm and 4pm each day.

We appreciate that this decision is devastating for patients and families for which we give our heartfelt apologies. This is incredibly upsetting but in these extraordinary times we, like hospitals and other healthcare institutions have to accept the lethality of the Coronavirus. If we do not stop people visiting and carrying in the disease, albeit inadvertently, we put patients' lives in clear and present danger. We also place the Inpatient Unit at risk of closure through the infection of our small team of highly specialist staff. Our Unit is not only vital to our patients but it also plays a critical role in keeping more NHS beds available especially during the COVID-19 emergency.

This decision, like those taken internationally in healthcare and daily life, has been made with careful consideration, heartfelt empathy and profound sadness. This is not what we would wish for or have ever imagined - but it is necessary.

The lives of all patients being cared for at St Catherine's Hospice and those looking after them depend on your understanding and compliance with this decision. Thank you.

Stephen Greenhalgh
Chief Executive