

Due to the COVID-19 visitation restrictions at long-term care facilities, residents are experiencing negative effects of isolation. My family and I have had personal experience with this. My mom was a resident at a long-term care memory facility in Salem, OR. She passed away on June 20, just over three months after the restrictions were put in place. Although she was suffering from Alzheimer's disease/dementia and had been for quite some time, I can't help but think the period of isolation aided in the decline of symptoms, thus speeding up her inevitable demise.

Not being able to see friends and family can have serious negative consequences for residents in these facilities. It is essential to the well-being of these residents that they have opportunities to connect with loved ones. I could speak volumes about the interactions I had with my mom before the lock down. Although she was non-communicative in her last year, she was still able to use her senses to hear my voice and feel my touch. The staff and hospice nurses at her care facility would regularly comment on a change for the positive in her demeanor when she realized I was there, and a negative change when I left the facility. I know many residents, along with my mom, would spend hours looking forward to visitations from their loved ones. It was/is the highlight of their day. To have that suddenly stripped away from them, and many do not even know why, is devastating both physically and emotionally.

Imagine being closed off from loved ones, not being able to see or interact with friends and family. Now imagine experiencing this isolation along with a debilitating, progressive disease. In many cases, the sick and the elderly are the ones who need this interaction the most. And if they are a resident in a long-term care facility, they are the first to be stripped of this human need for connection.

Because of this pandemic, and the restrictions that came with it, I was robbed of the final months of my mom's life. This is time neither of us will ever be able to get back. I urge you to consider a law that would require long term care facilities to have isolation prevention plans to enable residents to communicate with other residents, family members, friends, or other external support systems during a public emergency in order to possibly alleviate the emotional pain other families will certainly feel without such a law.

Would my mom still be around if she didn't lose all contact with her loved ones? Would her final days have been more bearable, filled with love and compassion from her family? There is no way anyone could have known the answers to these questions, and unfortunately, now we will never know. Thank you in advance for considering my testimony when making these important, possibly life-saving decisions.