



BFM TV

20H POLITICS –27/04/2020 – 20 :18 :25

Guest : Sophie BOISSARD, Chief Executive Officer of Korian Group

RUTH ELKRIEF

Good evening Sophie BOISSARD, thank you for being with us. You are the Chief Executive Officer of Korian. Korian is a group that owns a number of facilities, seniors' residences; almost a third of the Covid-19 victims are residents of nursing homes today and there have been many facilities affected, not at all only yours, but yours have been referred to, as well as others, regarding legal proceedings, because there have been concerns, too many deaths, too many brutal deaths. You have made your numbers public tonight. We know that there are 8,700 deaths of elderly people in France due to Covid. In your KORIAN facilities, how many were there?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

Thank you Ruth ELKRIEF for giving me the opportunity to speak this evening, and perhaps just before answering your question, I would like to say, we saw earlier that every night people applaud the hospital caregivers, and in fact I am here tonight to pay tribute to and really, to honour the caregivers in nursing homes, these nurses, these care assistants, doctors, cooks, service personnel who have been there since the beginning of March, who are at the side of the frail elderly who are the main people threatened by this epidemic and who, every day, courageously give the best of themselves with incredible commitment. And today we are hearing attacks in particular against our group, against KORIAN, and I will not let them, I cannot let them say what we are hearing today, which is absolutely unworthy and unspeakable regarding the level of dedication and what is happening in our network! So to come back to your question, we deeply regret 606 deaths currently in one of ... our 300 residences from corona virus, sure or at least supposed. Almost all of these deaths - and each death brings pain and suffering to the families, to the people concerned, and to the caregivers, too - and almost all of these deaths occurred in one of the 3 major epidemic zones in our country, i.e. Alsace and the large region of Ile-de-France which is really the ultimate cluster since the beginning of March.

RUTH ELKRIEF

So that's 606 deaths in total, all told. So how do you respond to families who may be blaming you for not having implemented the barrier

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gestures, for not having been equipped, and for perhaps having underestimated the epidemic?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

So, what I want to say very solemnly tonight is that we were ready and we did the maximum possible, always anticipating to the best of our knowledge. Just one example: as early as 25 February, we triggered the equivalent of the "Blue Plan" throughout the network. It is a bit technical, but it's the plan recommended by the authorities in the event of a flu epidemic, for example. It means that we monitored visits, took temperatures. On 6 March, one week before the requests of the public authorities in France, we suspended the visits. It was very difficult because at the beginning the families said: but why do they have to suspend the visits from 6 March? But we knew, because we are also present in Italy, Spain and Germany, we could see in Italy in particular how fast this virus was progressing. We built up against all odds because, as you know, there were difficulties concerning supplies, there was tension on the markets, we continually constituted a 30-day stock, which we are replenishing with masks, materials, protective equipment, hygiene caps and ...

RUTH ELKRIEF

Then how do you explain these deaths?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

And one last thing, excuse me, on 25 March the wearing of masks was generalized throughout France, whether or not there were cases of epidemics and remember, this decision was not taken until 15 days later for nursing homes. So how do I explain it? Well, in part I do not explain it. I think we have to accept that we are facing a virus that we do not know about, that has come down on us and I am the first to admit that I had not imagined for half a second at the end of February the virulence, the speed of this virus's contagion and the extent to which it is attacking the elderly. What I can tell you is that the cases in which we have really experienced outbreaks, with unfortunately many deaths in a very short time in Mougins in the Doubs, well, these are cases in which the virus was most likely there very early on, no doubt at the end of February, insidiously, and the day we did the screening because we had people who coughed a little and locally the doctors said "no, no, it's a flu, it's a little rhinitis" and then, we tested anyway, in Mougins, we tested on 15 March.

ALAIN MARSCHALL

Did you have the tests?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

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No, the hospital, there were 120 referral centres, so...

ALAIN MARSCHALL

Okay, it happened at the hospital.

SOPHIE BOISSARD

So we hospitalised..

ALAIN MARSCHALL

The tests didn't take place...

SOPHIE BOISSARD

The test was done, and then the verdict was given. It's Covid. There was not a single case of Covid in the Cannes area, not one! Other people with small flu symptoms were tested and in fact, we ended up with 20 positive cases already among the elderly, among the caregivers, a real outbreak and afterwards, the sky falls in! There were people who went from very small symptoms to, unfortunately, extremely sudden deterioration and death.

ALAIN MARSCHALL

So at no time did you conceal or hide patients' state of health, which some families have criticized you for?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

Never, never! Simply, what happened, and imagine also the extent to which this happens in a brief period of time, we have always communicated with ... the teams have always communicated with the designated family contact for each person in a facility and especially during this period of confinement, there is a designated contact. So the information concerning his relative was given. On the other hand, and this is true, I fully understand the emotion of the families who had to endure this kind of shock in realising that there was an epidemic and that their relative(s), whom they had not seen since the confinement, had died suddenly. It is true that, between the time the outbreak occurred and the first wave of deaths, very little time passed and there was no collective information to say, "This is the epidemic situation" and to inform the public. There was individual information and that comes as a shock and today, this is one of the reasons I decided several weeks ago, and I believe that we are the only network to do this, to make public, every week, the figure that we communicate to the French Public Health network on the deaths that occur and above all, in each nursing home, when we are aware of a first case, we of course inform the designated family contact and all of the families.

RUTH ELKRIEF

But you know that if there is anger or concern, it is also because we know the rates in nursing homes; they are very high; they are expensive for families. So there is an expectation, an expectation of service and an expectation of receiving special attention; that's what explains it.

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SOPHIE BOISSARD

I truly believe that this attention, this commitment, this presence is extremely strong; I also believe, and I believe that we must admit together, that we cannot completely block the entry of this virus, which is extremely, once again, insidious and overwhelming. What we can do, on the other hand, and this is really my strategy, and today, I am delighted that it is possible, well, there is a triptych to be applied: it is first of all, obviously, to have extremely rigorous hygiene measures everywhere, obviously the mask, washing hands; filtering visits, all things that are now really in place since the general confinement but that were not in place, of course, at the end of February or in early March when the first clusters developed in France, first of all. Secondly, screening must be carried out. We must screen.

RUTH ELKRIEF

Have you started?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

Of course we have started. Since 6 April..

ALAIN MARSCHALL

How?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

... a change in the government's doctrine which effectively says: for testing capacity, which is still unfortunately limited in France, well, priority is given to the elderly in nursing homes. And what did we do? Well, we organised ourselves with the support of the regional health agencies and hospitals, and also with the support of the city laboratories, to screen our entire network, and at the moment I am speaking to you, 6 April, a change in doctrine, today is 27 April, well, we have already screened, launched campaigns in half of our network, and by 6 May we will have screened the entire network, both the elderly and health professionals, because the only possible strategy, well, when someone is carrying the virus, even when they are not apparently sick, the only way to do it is to keep them away until they are no longer contagious, and very concretely, that's what we're doing and it's working, it is working!

RUTH ELKRIEF

Today's balance sheet?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

Today, we have about 15% of the staff in... We have 15% of the staff that is contagious in the facilities that we have had feedback from, so that means about a hundred facilities today, So, what do we do? People have been isolated, are on sick leave, we are replacing them, and I would like to say that since 1 March we have recruited 3,000 people, 3,000 people to come as reinforcements to our facilities, to support the care teams, to replace

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absent or sick employees. So we now have the means to get organised, it is the only way to contain this virus and to protect!

ALAIN MARSCHALL

So the whole problem was that some of the nursing staff had become personnel who were contaminating what in fact?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

No ...

ALAIN MARSCHALL

Before you moved on to the testing and screening phase?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

I do not think we can stigmatize this one or that one.

ALAIN MARSCHALL

No, I am not stigmatizing. It has been a dramatic reality, but a reality nonetheless!

SOPHIE BOISSARD

I think it is fair to say that in a normal nursing home, it is a place to live, a nursing home. So you have visitors, you have physiotherapists, you have associations, you have...

ALAIN MARSCHALL

Yes, but when the confinement started, the visits stopped!

SOPHIE BOISSARD

Yes, but do you remember when the general confinement took place in our...?

RUTH ELKRIEF

The 17th of March.

SOPHIE BOISSARD

The 17th of March. We had anticipated it for external visits on 6 March; you know that there can be incubation periods of 15 days. When we had an outbreak in Mougins and when we reconstruct history, most likely ...

ALAIN MARSCHALL

It was the families...

SOPHIE BOISSARD

No the virus again, the epidemic investigation, it was not done, it was not in our power to do it, it should have been done at the time, well it was not done. On 15 March, in all likelihood, the virus has been circulating since the end of February and that was the case in Mulhouse; remember the evangelical rally, where it was also the case.

RUTH ELKRIEF

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We saw that trade unions, notably the CFDT, supported you on behalf of the staff, which is not always the case in companies. Were you surprised? Were you pleasantly surprised?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

I think it is just very representative of the enormous mobilisation within the company around one common cause, being with our fragile elderly, and doing everything we can to stop this virus, and the important point is that today, two thirds of the network is intact, is protected; we're getting there. There is an incredible mobilisation, I have never seen such a strong mobilisation everywhere, and the trade unions have simply said, I would say, that social dialogue within the company today is that since 1 March, the works council has been meeting twice a week to look together at what we are doing, the means that are being made available, and the problems that may arise.

MARGAUX DE FROUVILLE

You did say that there was a change of doctrine on the government's part from 6 April to massive testing. Prior to that date, the process was to test the first two residents with symptoms and then others presenting the same symptoms were considered contaminated. Do you feel that the reports of deaths are reliable in view of this earlier form of diagnosis, which was not systematic?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

So again, I think it is obviously important to be able to follow the epidemiological data. We won't know what's going on until later, but I can tell you what we're doing, I do not know what others are doing. Obviously, we are tracing very precisely the first symptomatic cases ... the first tested cases and all the symptomatic cases afterwards are assimilated by extension to cases of coronavirus. So we take a very broad approach.

MARGAUX DE FROUVILLE

What about deaths? Is it the same thing? We consider...

SOPHIE BOISSARD

And for deaths, it is obviously the same thing.

ALAIN MARSCHALL

Two more quick questions. The first is, can the de-confinement plan that the head of government is going to announce change things for you, particularly in terms of family visits? How is that going to work?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

So first and foremost is that I am very happy. Almost 10 days ago, I called for the return to allowing safe visits, because the social distancing undergone since 6 March is so long. We have been working for over a week now to organize these visits and we see how much life is returning to the facilities. And what I can tell you, Alain MARSHALL, is that today we have

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really organized ourselves to live sustainably in an environment where the virus will continue to circulate and it's working; we're getting there. Our teams are ready for it, our nursing homes are ready for it, we're getting there by talking to the families to see how to organise ourselves and sustainably, well, we will know how to do it.

RUTH ELKRIEF

Thank you very much Sophie BOISSARD.

ALAIN MARSCHALL

I just wanted to know...

RUTH ELKRIEF

It is 8:30 at night...

ALAIN MARSCHALL

...if you were going to, yes, you were going to pay a bonus to your employees or not?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

Absolutely because...

RUTH ELKRIEF

Why not sooner?

SOPHIE BOISSARD

Because, well, the measures were decided only a few days ago now by the government, and it is in any case something that is extremely important for me, to be able to testify to the exceptional commitment, the courage that they have shown and it will be done before the end of this quarter.

ALAIN MARSCHALL

Thank you Sophie BOISSARD ...

RUTH ELKRIEF

Thank you very much.

ALAIN MARSCHALL

Thank you for having been with us, Chief Executive Officer of Korian Group, a group that operates nursing homes. 20 :31 :16 END*

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