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To Whom It May Concern,

### **Re. Carers for people with Environmental Illness**

Clients with Environmental Illness, (Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) and Electro-Hypersensitivity (EHS)) have exceptional care needs. Unless they avoid incitants the sufferer's health continues to decline. In its most severe form sufferers become bedbound unable to tolerate light, sound, any of their possessions, food, medicines or electrical fields. At this point it is very difficult to recover. Avoidance of chemicals that trigger reactions is an important part of the treatment process as the body cannot heal if it is continually reacting.

Environmental Illness is a condition arising from damage to, and deficiencies of the immune system and biochemical detoxification pathways. This results in heightened sensitivity to all manner of man-made and naturally occurring materials - whether they be in foods, liquids, solids or gas/air and even electromagnetic fields. People affected by Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) can't process toxins (xenobiotics) properly because their immune and detoxification systems are damaged. They have allergic-type reactions to synthetic and natural chemicals and fragrances.

Sufferers can react to anything that's breathed in, eaten or absorbed through the skin. The most common triggers are volatile organic compounds (VOCs) like chemicals and fragrances in washing powder, toiletries, perfume, air fresheners, solvents, plastic, rubber, smoke, exhaust fumes, pesticides, decorating and cleaning products. People with MCS react to very low doses of substances at levels healthy individuals might not even notice. Some also react to food, moulds, electrical fields, mobile phones and Wi-Fi.

Reactions vary according to the type of chemical and how ill the sufferer is. They can include breathing difficulties, confusion, dizziness, exhaustion, shaking, skin rashes, headaches, palpitations or collapse. Some reactions are instant, others will occur hours or days later as the body tries to process the toxins.

Every chemical avoided is one less burden on the immune system and increases the likelihood of recovery. Avoiding as many triggers as practical is one of the most important parts of treatment. Visitors can help by reducing the amount of chemicals and fragrances they wear or bring into the house.

MCS affects hundreds of thousands of people worldwide, of all ages and backgrounds.

On a practical note, people disabled by Multiple Chemical Sensitivity need to have carers who are familiar with their needs and who can be as fragrance-free as possible. It is usually easier to achieve this through Direct Payments as the carer can then familiarise a regular

carer with their requirements. Each sufferer is different, however previous solutions have included carers wearing a boiler suit over their regular clothes, or changing into a set of clothes and a hat provided by and kept at the client's home. This is no different to providing a uniform for carers while at work.

It is of course extremely helpful for carers to change their laundry products and toiletries for fragrance-free versions, but it is accepted that this may not suit everyone. At the very least carers must be people who do not regularly wear perfume or aftershave. They must not be smokers, and must not have air fresheners in their car at any time. In the case of severe MCS, clients may have to insist on a carer who regularly uses fragrance-free laundry detergent as they react to minute traces of chemicals on anyone in their house and long after the carer has left. They may also have to communicate indirectly by leaving notes for the carer, and will require duties carried out in a very specific way. It is vital that the carer respects this, however unusual it seems to someone without MCS.

Clients with Electro-Hypersensitivity (EHS) react to very low levels of electrical and magnetic fields. They also react to mobile phones and Wi-Fi. Carers should be encouraged to leave their mobile phones and handbags (which often contain fragranced products) in their car. If essential they may be able to redirect calls to the client's landline phone or use this as an emergency number,

MCS-Aware have prepared free information leaflets on Fragrance-Free products, and also a simple explanation of MCS which can be given to carers, please contact us for further details.

If you have any queries, please contact MCS-Aware for further information. We would also like to know how useful you have found this information. The more feedback we have, the more practical guidance we can give. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

Pete deBiasio  
Trustee, MCS-Aware  
The Charity for Environmental Illness