

Access

Oral History Interview with [REDACTED]
Conducted by Alison Brennan on July 21, 2021

Alison Brennan [00:00:02] So, today is July 21st, 2021 and my name is Alison Brennan. I'm interviewing [REDACTED] in an office via audio recording. This interview is being conducted as part of a project organized by the National Humanities Center in conjunction with the University of Washington. Our goal is to collect, preserve and share the stories and experiences of health care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Okay. So, just to get started, could you tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do professionally?

[REDACTED] [00:00:33] Um, well, I'm a nursing assistant here in the South Clinic. I check people in and I get the complaints down for what they're being seen for the day. And I'll tell them, put them into a room, and I tell the provider what they're here for.

Alison Brennan [00:00:46] Okay, great. Um, and I guess why did you volunteer to be interviewed today? I mean, I asked you, but what convinced you to do this?

[REDACTED] [00:00:57] It's honestly to tell about the story of COVID.

Alison Brennan [00:01:00] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:01:01] It's something that everybody experienced differently. I mean, I didn't to work all the way through it, but I worked halfway through. It's just something that we all should share eventually.

Alison Brennan [00:01:13] Yeah. No, that's a great reason. So, when did you start working here?

[REDACTED] [00:01:17] October 1st was my very first day. I started as a medical assistant before I was a nursing assistant.

Alison Brennan [00:01:23] Okay. Okay. And what was, was your role different then?

[REDACTED] [00:01:28] Yeah.

Alison Brennan [00:01:28] Ok.

[REDACTED] [00:01:28] So, my initial, at the time, was to sit at the front desk and to check people in and get their temperature and see if they were here to be seen for a clinic or if they were here to be seen for COVID issues or any other general questions, sending them to the E.R. and then after a little bit, the pharmacy, we weren't allowing people to come inside to get their pharmacy. So, I volunteered to step outside and deliver pills to the people outside and in the full gown and everything like that and full PPE [Personal Protective Equipment]. And that continued on for about three months, four months.

Alison Brennan [00:02:03] Wow.

[REDACTED] [00:02:03] And then I finally got changed - I got switched around quite a bit.

Alison Brennan [00:02:06] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:02:07] So, I was in a PRC department after that trying to help take care of things in there too, because a lot of our people aren't getting their bills paid.

Alison Brennan [00:02:16] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:02:16] So, there's a lot of people that are getting sent to collections and so they put me there to try to help them. Yeah, that was what my initial role was there.

Alison Brennan [00:02:22] Okay. Okay. So, then I guess like what did a typical - I know you changed a lot - but what did like maybe a typical day or a typical week or day or two look like kind of back in October when you started for you?

[REDACTED] [00:02:35] A typical day was showing up here at 6 a.m. or 5:45 a.m.

Alison Brennan [00:02:40] Oh my gosh.

[REDACTED] [00:02:40] And getting the cart ready for to check the employees. And I would check all the employees. And there was about 167 people I check in every single day and then after that, I would say from six to or from seven till nine. And then after that, I would come back here, put the cart away, and get my supplies for the day, and then head out to the front and get my gown on, put my mask on, my N-95, glasses, and I go outside and I go start to talk to people, see what kind of medications they need and get their chart number down and then come back inside. That was the start of the day and throughout the day it was just constant walking. I mean, I have pictures on my watch - of my watch - that show me walking 7.13 miles, just going back and forth, back and forth. I mean, that was the rest of the day for just over 6 hours I was there.

Alison Brennan [00:03:44] Yeah, that's a long time. Okay. So, and I imagine that's pretty different from what a typical day now looks like. So, what is the typical day look like for you now?

[REDACTED] [00:03:56] I'm not coming in as early for sure.

Alison Brennan [00:03:58] Yep.

[REDACTED] [00:04:00] I wake up a lot less. Come in here checking patients. I don't have to check on the entire hospital anymore, which is nice, but I kind of miss visiting with everybody.

Alison Brennan [00:04:08] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:04:09] Now, it's, uh, just taking care of patients here.

Alison Brennan [00:04:13] Yeah, kind of back to a little bit more of normal.

[REDACTED] [00:04:16] Yeah.

Alison Brennan [00:04:17] Um, okay, so this is kind of an interesting question, but do you remember, like, the first activity or event that has changed as a result of the pandemic?

[REDACTED] [00:04:28] First activity - obviously hanging out with people is still really weird.

Alison Brennan [00:04:32] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:04:32] That's the fact of like you don't know.

Alison Brennan [00:04:37] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:04:39] That's the most basic activity, in my opinion, that's changed.

Alison Brennan [00:04:42] That's a good yeah, that's a really good point. Um, how about your relationships with coworkers like in the health care system? Did those change as a result of the COVID pandemic?

[REDACTED] [00:04:52] I feel like we got a little closer. Honestly, I feel like everybody kind of backed each other up. Something like that.

Alison Brennan [00:04:59] Oh, that's great. And you talked about it a little bit. But I guess now, like, have the new protocols that have been put in place change the general ways that you interact with patients?

[REDACTED] [00:05:12] Yes, they're, uh, a little less strict. I don't really care for how little less strict there are. In my opinion, they should be more strict. But the patients seemed to be more happier about the way things are going now. So, as long as the patient's happy, that's fine with me.

Alison Brennan [00:05:30] Yeah, that's interesting. So, do you think that the protocols that are in place now are sufficient, or do you think they should be stricter in which ways?

[REDACTED] [00:05:38] The ways that they're trying to tell everybody to take their masks off, people that are vaccinated are still getting sick and still being put into the hospital from this.

Alison Brennan [00:05:46] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:05:47] Honestly, I just think that just wear them.

Alison Brennan [00:05:51] Yeah, no kidding. Um, yeah. So, you kind of talked a little bit about patient interactions, but do you think that you have any, like, stories or moments that you shared with patients that have been meaningful during the pandemic?

[REDACTED] [00:06:06] Meaningful? I guess the one thing that really comes to my mind is there's an elderly lady that needed help getting out of the car. Security guards were like, No, we don't do that. We're not going to help with that. I wasn't even a nursing assistant, yet. I was a medical support assistant. And I ran into the E.R. [Emergency Room] and I grabbed a wheelchair, and I ran out there, and I basically picked her up out of

her car and put her in a wheelchair. And the security was just like, Oh, we don't do that. And I was just like, Well, you don't have to but it's just called being a good person.

Alison Brennan [00:06:39] Yeah, yeah. That's a good story. Thanks for sharing that. Um, how about are there things that have, like, kind of frightened or unsettled you, um, at work during the pandemic?

[REDACTED] [00:06:52] The unpredictability of people, uh, and pills throwing back at me for trying out for cause I didn't get a certain thing for them. They threw the pills at me. I don't know. That was the only thing that really frightened me, cause I sometimes will get angry.

Alison Brennan [00:07:12] As people do - [workplace intercom] - kind of going off of the frightened or unsettled. Did you feel like you had like adequate protection, like PPE [Personal Protective Equipment] and that kind of stuff?

[REDACTED] [00:07:25] Yeah, I feel like I had adequate protection for the against the virus and stuff.

Alison Brennan [00:07:29] Ok.

[REDACTED] [00:07:29] But it was - there's some people that would come in and not have a mask and be upset about having to put a mask on in the federal building. You know, the unpredictability right there, you know, they make those videos you seen of people coming up and coughing and stuff like that. That's like the one thing that I had a fear of is somebody coming in with no mask and getting mad at me for saying, Hey, put a mask up.

Alison Brennan [00:07:46] And did that happen?

[REDACTED] [00:07:47] No, not at all.

Alison Brennan [00:07:48] Good.

[REDACTED] [00:07:48] Thankfully. But that was my fear.

Alison Brennan [00:07:49] Yeah. No, no, totally. Yeah. That's what I asked. I was just curious. Okay, so you talked about how you kind of, you had, like, adequate PPE, but like, a lot of people that I've spoken with have kind of had opinions about the level of support they've gotten from the hospital. And I was wondering if you could speak to whether or not you felt supported and if you have any examples of that?

[REDACTED] [00:08:12] For being supported?

Alison Brennan [00:08:14] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:08:15] Honestly, I think it was more within the staff itself to support each other and not on the higher-ups. I mean, we kind of had to keep each other going because they sat in their ivory tower and but I mean as long as we were basically

pushing each other up, I felt like we were going. It was just more of a pure support that we had.

Alison Brennan [00:08:36] Good. Yeah, I'm glad that you had that. I think a lot of people have kind of spoken about that. And you talked about kind of like checking people in and running the meds out. But like now can you talk a little bit about the safety measures that are in place currently to protect against COVID? And do you think that that like meet the challenge of protecting people?

[REDACTED] [00:09:01] Could you repeat that, again?

Alison Brennan [00:09:02] Yeah, I know. That was kind of a long one. So, kind of what, what are - what's the hospital doing now to, like, protect people against COVID? And, like, do you think it's enough basically?

[REDACTED] [00:09:13] So, I think that - I think it's adequate.

Alison Brennan [00:09:18] Ok.

[REDACTED] [00:09:18] For now because you try to ask somebody to do something here and they don't want to do it. But regardless of whether you want to do it or not, you kind of have to do it but the safety measures that we're taking here is, you know, there's vaccines that we have taken, that we've given to all of the society that has been here. It's for sure been the one good thing that we have done here, as well as the mask, as when you come into the federal building, you know, you are required to have a mask on. So, I think as well as having the vaccine and the mask protection there, I believe that's fairly adequate for what's going on. It's just up to the people themselves. We have hand-sanitizer stations all over the hospital, so it's, it's up to the people to use them themselves.

Alison Brennan [00:10:05] Yeah, for sure. Yeah, they're everywhere. Um, so speaking of the vaccine, have you received the vaccine and what went into your decision?

[REDACTED] [00:10:15] Yes, I have received it. And that was my decision. And to be completely honest, was I didn't know if I was going to need it to travel because I had a trip coming up and, uh, so I got it for the travel, but my very first shot got me really sick.

Alison Brennan [00:10:32] Yeah. Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:10:34] Other than that my biggest, my other decision behind that was, uh, I live with a paraplegic and she is 60 - she's in her sixties.

Alison Brennan [00:10:44] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:10:45] So, if I was to get it and bring it home, it almost basically be a death sentence for her.

Alison Brennan [00:10:49] Sure. Yeah. No kidding. Yeah. So, what do you think the biggest impact of the pandemic will be for you personally in a long-term sense, like in the next five or ten years?

[REDACTED] [00:11:04] The long-term? Probably going to be socially awkward.

Alison Brennan [00:11:08] Yeah. Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:11:11] Social interaction is something that, you know, kind of been a challenge for me in the very beginning.

Alison Brennan [00:11:17] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:11:17] But this whole pandemic at the, when I started, you know, just kind of like added on to it and still there, you don't know what's going to, who's going to be there. But, um, another thing is I probably will always have a mask with me.

Alison Brennan [00:11:31] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:11:31] If there's bunches of the people that something that I probably will always do is have a mask.

Alison Brennan [00:11:36] Sure. Yeah. No, I think that's - that sounds reasonable. Um, so you'll have a mask. What other kinds of, like, routines or behaviors that you would not have had before the pandemic have kind of become normal or automatic to you?

[REDACTED] [00:11:50] Uh, I have never thought my hands would consume more alcohol -

Alison Brennan [00:11:54] Yup.

[REDACTED] [00:11:54] Than my liver. I'm just going to say that right now. I have used hand sanitizer like it's water. Like, I don't know, I just I use it every like everywhere I go. I see one I'm like, more hand sanitizer, and my hands are starting to pay for it.

Alison Brennan [00:12:07] Yeah, my hands are pretty dry, too. Yeah, that's a good point. Um, and then, like, what do you think the biggest impact of the pandemic will be in a global sense? Not just for you, but -

[REDACTED] [00:12:22] In global sense - it's kind of a hard one to answer.

Alison Brennan [00:12:27] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:12:28] Everybody thinks differently. There's a lot of people that I'm sure they just don't care and they're probably just going to live like it's normal. But then for those that actually do care, I think the businesses being shut down, I think there's just going to be a lot of pain.

Alison Brennan [00:12:43] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:12:44] For a while because people have put time and effort and sweat and tears into these things and it just gets torn away.

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Alison Brennan [00:12:53] Yeah. Yeah. That's a good insight. This is kind of an interesting question, but is there any particular image that kind of comes to your mind when you think about how COVID has affected you over the past year?

[REDACTED] [00:13:11] YouTube is the first thing that comes to my mind. I don't know why it's like the music.

Alison Brennan [00:13:16] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:13:16] There's one song in particular that's by Iann Dior and that's like the first thing that comes to my mind. And it's a picture of a - it was the background - okay, so they're inside of a house and they're looking outside. And this is the picture that always comes to my head when I think of coronavirus because that was the very first song I listened to when I went into lockdown.

Alison Brennan [00:13:38] Okay.

[REDACTED] [00:13:39] And it was MGK and Iann Dior. They were there looking outside the window. And outside the window there was a COVID, like the COVID spikes, like the whole ball. And you had all of the spikes around. I don't know. It's just kind of like, you know, that's exactly how it feels. You know, you look outside and it's just like it's out there, but where's it at? You know, you can't see it. It could be right in front of you. That's just the one thing that comes to my mind.

Alison Brennan [00:14:06] Yeah. Oh, that's a really, that's a powerful image. Uh, yeah. So, because you're in health care, do you think that you feel like more personally, professionally burdened by the pandemic?

[REDACTED] [00:14:19] No.

Alison Brennan [00:14:19] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:14:20] I just feel like it's a job to do.

Alison Brennan [00:14:22] Yeah.

Alison Brennan [00:14:23] Okay, well, this is probably going to answer the next question that we have, but a lot of people have called health care workers heroes for their work during the pandemic. Do you feel comfortable with people referring to you as a hero?

[REDACTED] [00:14:34] No.

Alison Brennan [00:14:35] Why not?

[REDACTED] [00:14:36] I don't feel like one.

Alison Brennan [00:14:36] Ok.

[REDACTED] [00:14:38] I just feel like I'm doing a job.

Alison Brennan [00:14:39] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:14:43] I mean in actuality, what is a hero? I mean we're just unfortunately coming out here, and it's almost exposing ourselves, and that's all I'm doing.

Alison Brennan [00:14:55] Yeah. Yeah. Um, speaking of exposures, have you personally or a close family member or friend had COVID?

[REDACTED] [00:15:05] My mom did actually. She had COVID.

Alison Brennan [00:15:06] So, what was that experience like?

[REDACTED] [00:15:09] Oh, when I first found out, it was a little bit scary and I didn't entirely know what to expect. And I was afraid, first off, because of how serious it is. But the second thing that came to mind is that my mom is a very strong woman and I'm scared for COVID, for her, you know? But after I found out that she was doing alright it kind of really eased my mind, but the fact of knowing that it could take a turn for the worse, but not knowing when or if, I don't know, it's just the fear of what can happen was the scariest part.

Alison Brennan [00:15:43] Yeah. You just kind of never know. Um, are there any, like major events or changes or anything that stand out to you during this pandemic? Like when you think about the past year?

[REDACTED] [00:15:57] Obviously just the social limiting.

Alison Brennan [00:15:59] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:15:59] At first, there was a lot of people dispersed, but now that everybody's vaccinated, they're all like, Oh, we can come together, we can do this. But that's the one thing that I have seen change the most, is that even with the biggest celebration, you know, like our most recent one, the Celebration of Healing, which is normally called National American Indian Days, even that wasn't even as packed as normal. And that wasn't as full of everything that it normally was full of. Yeah just the socially is a huge change.

Alison Brennan [00:16:34] Yeah. How did it feel to have, like, that major event, community event?

[REDACTED] [00:16:39] It felt good.

Alison Brennan [00:16:40] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:16:40] The sound of [workplace intercom] the drums is nice.

Alison Brennan [00:16:46] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:16:47] It feels nice.

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Alison Brennan [00:16:49] And did you feel kind of comfortable coming together knowing that people are mostly vaccinated, or what was your reasoning there?

[REDACTED] [00:16:55] I only went there once and that was just for food. I waited 35-minutes. But I mean, the whole thing that I didn't feel safe was there was even though people were vaccinated, they weren't wearing masks. You know, I didn't wear a mask around because I don't think there was going to that many people there. But I was already waiting for food and then it got crowded. So. But yeah.

Alison Brennan [00:17:19] Yeah, kind of different.

[REDACTED] [00:17:21] Yeah.

Alison Brennan [00:17:23] Do you think that kind of community events or, you know, larger gatherings will stay like, I don't know, like smaller or toned down or different? How do you think we'll be different in the future?

[REDACTED] [00:17:34] I think, I think they're going to stay the same. I think it's going to just kind of be a community thing now. More of, like you said, having the - I mean we'd have like people from all over the US kind of for North American Indian Days. Vendors from New Mexico and stuff like that. So, I think it's just going to be a community thing. I don't know.

Alison Brennan [00:18:00] Yeah, no. It's a - nobody really knows. I'm just curious about your perspective. Um, okay, so if you could go back in time and visit your pre-pandemic self, what advice would you give yourself to surviving in this new world?

[REDACTED] [00:18:17] Nothing's permanent.

Alison Brennan [00:18:19] Yeah.

[REDACTED] [00:18:19] Just move forward. You know, when it gets tough, just keep going.

Alison Brennan [00:18:29] Yeah, just kind of keep going. Nothing's permanent. Do you mean that, like, in kind of a like an individual sense? Like moments are fleeting or like -.

[REDACTED] [00:18:39] Individual. I'm just saying that even if it was a moment that you cherish for a little bit or a moment that you're going to stay here at this hospital for a while. I pretend like in this case even though I'm planning on staying here for a while, it's only temporary.

Alison Brennan [00:18:58] Yeah. That's a good point. Yeah. Well, do you have any hopes or fears about the future as we go forward dealing with COVID?

[REDACTED] [00:19:10] I just hope that eventually it's just going to be like a flu thing that we're just going to need to get a one-year vaccine for. And we'll be fine because this whole quarantine and isolation and all of these things kind of takes a toll.

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Alison Brennan [00:19:30] Yeah, it really does. Okay. Well, are there any questions that I didn't ask that you think I should have?

[REDACTED] [00:19:38] No, I think you nailed it all.

[REDACTED] [00:19:39] Okay. And then just like I want to respect your time, but before we finish, are there any other thoughts or reflections that you'd like to discuss that we didn't cover?

[REDACTED] [00:19:49] No.

Alison Brennan [00:19:50] Okay. All right. I got it then. All right. Well, thank you so much.

[REDACTED] [00:19:54] Thank you.