

Transcript
Coronavirus Q & A – Episode 21
August 28, 2020



Alex Metricarti: Hello! I'm Alex Metricarti, Chief Marketing and Public Relations Officer for Living Branches. Today is Friday, August 28, 2020. I'm here today with Edward Brubaker, Living Branches President/CEO for another one of our weekly chats. Let me start with a review of where we are with coronavirus at our campuses. I am pleased to say that technically speaking, we have zero cases of coronavirus anywhere at Living Branches. The reason that I say technically speaking is that we do have one staff person whose entire family has coronavirus. They knew they were exposed and have been self-quarantining, so there is no possibility that anyone at Living Branches was exposed. So we do not have to count that as a coronavirus incident for us. Ed, maybe you want to talk a little bit about what we know about this particular case.

EB: We certainly don't want to go into details about it, as far as who it was and that kind of thing, however it's a sad situation – a great case study, but a sad situation because it shows how this disease is still out there, number one, and how it can be devastating if you are in situations where you are exposed. It also reaffirms the idea of the 14-day quarantine when you are exposed, because it was into that 14-day quarantine when the symptoms started. So if that person would have been back to work during that time it would have been a problem. So I know we're getting more and more push back about restrictions and can't we do this, can't we do that – and I understand that. We need to also balance that with health needs of the community, meaning the Living Branches community, the population we serve. The reality that we don't want to resurge. And I understand Europe is maybe having some resurgence. We do not want that. So we need to be diligent. So again for us it was a sobering reminder, frankly, that this disease is still around and is still very serious even though we feel that we're at a much different place. And frankly, we are at a different place than we were just a month or two ago.

AM: This person's family is *sick*.

EB: Yes. This is not a walk in the park. This is serious.

AM: There are hospitalizations involved and so I think prayers would be appreciated.

EB: Very much so.

AM: You got to experience a little bit of a coronavirus related situation – impacting some plans in your household. Would you maybe want to share about that?

EB: I wasn't sure where you were going with that at the moment, but now I understand. Yeah. It was really just an illustration of we're all in this together. We're all experiencing the realities of COVID. Our daughter Brandy was planning and did get married this summer – actually just last Saturday. But it was plan C. The original wedding was supposed to take place at Terrain in Glen Mills – and that very early on – maybe March or April – we were already talking with her and her fiancé, now our son-in-law, about how that's not going to happen. So plan B was to do the wedding in Missouri, which is where her husband is from. But we knew when we were talking about that, that that could change, too, if Missouri was put on the quarantine state list by Pennsylvania. His grandparents were a big influence in his life and they could have been at the wedding – even there it was probably going to be less than 10 people. But Missouri was added. So probably two weeks after that – we had looked at Missouri which was plan B. Plan C was mom and dad's – Lucy and my side yard. It turned out to be a very wonderful day. He was able to have his mother and two siblings come in. His grandparents could be there via Zoom. But there was a total of seven persons at this ceremony that was supposed to be for over 100. I don't say that to ask for pity because it ended up being a very nice day, but I say that to say we are all being impacted by this. Some in bigger ways than others. And I don't want to make that more than what it was, because other people are staying in their apartments for months on end and things like that. So there are degrees that we're all dealing with this. But we are all dealing with it in some way, shape, or form. Life in 2020 and not just because of coronavirus or COVID – for a lot of other reasons as well, some of which we've talked on in these videos. But 2020 has been an unusual year – one that I can honestly say, I've never experience one like it in my lifetime, and hope frankly to never again need to experience one like this. But we are truly in this together. We need to be supportive of each other. We need to be resilient. Frankly, that experience with the wedding taught resilience. It taught the changing of decisions, the reality that you don't have to have this big wedding number one to get married, but also to have a nice event. There was something nice about a small event, too. So we need to look for those things we can be grateful for in life, because there are a lot of things here in 2020 that we would like to be done with. So anyway, just a story from my own life, but everyone in this room and everyone in Living Branches would have a story to tell as well.

AM: I noticed this week I got a lot of questions from various family members and residents centered around visitation and we see more events starting to take place, so how can I go to that safely or what are my options? People wanting advice about that. So yes you can see that life is trying to resume and people are getting creative about how that can take place, but there's still a lot of dodging and weaving that's going on.

EB: That's right. I had some experiences this week with phone calls that came in that I needed to pass onto people or things that I dealt with myself from families concerned about this and family members who wanted to participate in an event off campus, or whatever. And depending on the level of care, there are still restrictions. And there were legitimate questions asked about, ok, we have phase one, phase two, and phase three, where is four, five, and six? Well we haven't been given that yet. So there is this void that is frustrating – it's frustrating for us well. We are committed to continue to work through this, but that is the reality of life right now. There is a lot of uncertainty. There are decisions being made that we try to make the best decisions

we can, but I'll say there have been mistakes we've made as well and we try to learn from them. So it is a challenging time. And I would say overall people have been very supportive, very appreciative. And I appreciate the questions, too, because we need to challenge ourselves and say is the best we can do? Or are there other things we can look at? But it is a challenge and there are no easy answers, but we're committed to working through it.

AM: And some of the stuff about visiting guidelines doesn't affect people in Residential Living like it does Personal Care, Memory Care, and Health Care, but yes, as we say, we still do not have permission from the state to let family members take those residents off campus, even for simple things like getting a haircut or going to a birthday party, which is causing a lot of consternation for people.

EB: Yeah, that's right. But when you think about it in Personal Care, Memory Care, and Health Care, there's a lot more things happening in a congregate setting sense, if you will. If you're in Residential Living you can go back to your unit and self-isolate if you choose to do that. And then other more group activities – there's some controls around that. Whereas in Personal Care, Health Care, and Memory Care, there's dining that's now happening appropriately spaced, etc. but there's a lot more potential for transmission, and so I totally get and empathize with the sadness that comes along with not being able to do more. On the other hand, there's that risk and continuing to balance that is really, frankly, the challenge. Balancing the risk of transmission and the safety, with the other realities too, of which the emotional health and well-being of ourselves as human beings is important as well. So, it's a challenge but like I said, we have a good group working at it. And we are committed to continuing to work at this. To find ways forward.

AM: And this last couple of weeks we've seen a little bit of movement about serial testing which might have implications for visitation.

EB: That's right. I've asked some persons to be working on this. We've been working on it. We're not there yet, but we hope to be rolling something out in October. But honestly there are new articles every day about new tests that are coming out, the efficacy and accuracy of the tests – so there's a lot of things to consider. But I really do believe that testing and trying to get a test, even if it's not 100% accurate – if it's accurate enough that we can screen out people in a quick fashion to say they're positive or to say they're negative. That would just be so helpful. And so we want to keep working at that and honestly I believe that's going to end up having more of an impact on us in the nearer term than a vaccine will. Because again, we've talked about this before – even if a vaccine is ready by first quarter next year – and I know some people would like it to be earlier. And I would too, but we need to be realistic. But even then, it takes time to vaccinate people. Do people trust the vaccine? There are so many things. It's not a panacea or a magic bullet. So I think we have to have these other things like testing, so honestly it was a disappointment to me the other day when the CDC said reduce testing, you don't have to test for symptoms. I will go on record saying I think that is a wrong move. I think

that was a bad decision. And I think it was influenced too much by politics and not enough by medicine. I'll go on record to say that. Having said that, we're not going to pay attention to that because our state and our local government is stricter than that. And I believe and I have believed since the beginning of this pandemic that testing is such a critical way for us to get to the other side. So we're absolutely pursuing that. We not close enough to announce anything yet, but we're definitely working on finding ways to use the quick antigen test so that we can get a good read on things. That will be coming over the next few months.

AM: I was disappointed by that CDC announcement, in part because there has been a lot of changing guidance come as a result of this pandemic, and we're learning. We're learning every day. And in some ways that is understandable to me. This decision was the first time it felt overtly political to me. Part of the reason I was so disappointed in that was from my opinion, what we've learning from the testing we've been able to do recently versus testing we did in March and April – to me that really did demonstrate the very concrete positive benefits of being able to test our residents and our staff persons as soon as we suspect somebody might have it. In my opinion, that really reduced the spread at The Willows and Park View.

EB: Absolutely. That's right. And that's the important thing to keep in mind, too. Negative tests are great, unless their false negative. But you're really trying to figure out who is positive so you can get them isolated as soon as possible. So the actionable data is really the positive test, so when you have that you can say to the staff person – you need to go home immediately and get a PCR test.

AM: That's the one up the nose.

EB: Yes, the PCR is a more accurate test. But the antigen test can give us a good read quickly. So do that so you can isolate and take action and avoid the risk of spread – that is key and critical. So I'm hopeful that this will give us some better answers going forward. I know families are frustrated. Staff is frustrated. Residents are frustrated. With how do we keep moving toward more of a sense of normalcy, and it's a challenge. But we are committed to keep working at it and find ways that we can do it, frankly, even if it costs us money. Because we feel it's an investment in our health and safety but also to make us an attractive place for people to move into as well. We are a vibrant community and we will be even more vibrant in those hopefully less than too many months. But it's going to be quite some period of time. But we need to find ways that we can do that in a safe and good way.

AM: It was nice last week to recapture that vibrancy. It was our Chicken BBQ week. At Dock Woods they had an ice cream truck and in-person entertainment in the parking lot. At Souderton because they have the in-house cable channel they had some nice programming with that. Then of course we had the auction, the hymn sing, and the concert. From what I heard we ended up raising over \$18,000 towards the benevolent care fund. It was nice to see.

EB: Yes it was very nice. I got quite a few notes from residents expressing their appreciation and gratitude. It was nice to get the notes – I don't expect to get those things. It was certainly nice and thoughtful of people. But for me the thing that hit me was we've had a challenging couple of months and here are people who are finding ways to be grateful. That's an important lesson for me, too, to say when I get down, or depressed, or concerned to remember what are those things that I can still be grateful for because there are still those things out there. And honestly I think that's a secret to a long and happy life, and frankly one that I need to keep learning, to be honest. But that idea of gratefulness was so impressive to me. The sense of gratefulness that came through those persons' notes and comments they made – focusing on the positive which is wonderful.

AM: Thank you. Any closing comments you'd like to make?

EB: Hang in there! We will get to the other side. But it is a bumpy journey. We will have fits and starts. We will have frustrations. Be patient with us. We will keep working hard on your behalf, on behalf of staff, residents, and families. But it will be bumpy, I can guarantee. But we will be committed to keep working and finding ways that we can make life as enjoyable as possible. And really keep working toward getting back to that sense of calm and good experiences for all of us. So again hang in there and we'll get there together.

AM: If you have any questions, feel free to send them to coronavirusquestions@livingbranches.org and you can always check our website which is where we have the most up to date information – what step we're in, visitation, etc. Thank you very much and we'll talk to you next week.