

Transcript
Coronavirus Q & A – Episode 28
November 13, 2020



Alex Metricarti: Hello! I'm Alex Metricarti, Chief Marketing and Public Relations Officer for Living Branches. Today is Friday, November 13, 2020. Welcome! And welcome to Ed Brubaker, our President and CEO.

Edward Brubaker: Thank you!

AM: I guess let's start with an update. We have testing cases to report again both at Dock Terrace at our Dock Woods campus and Health Care at Souderton Mennonite Homes. Do you want to talk about that?

EB: Yes we have two situations in Health Care, like you said. At Dock Woods we have one person who tested positive, one staff member. So we needed to close the facility and do our testing. We also had the same situation at Souderton where a staff member tested positive. Since that time I think we've had another one test positive on the Dock Woods campus, if I'm not mistaken. So that will push our 14-day period of time out a bit further. What that means then is that we need to go into a testing mode. We did the first round of testing last week, we did more this week, and then we'll do more next week. We'll talk later about the reality that we're moving towards weekly testing in Health Care from monthly because of the infection rate in the county. But it shows the power of one. One person means that we need to do that. Not to blame them, but just to say how serious this is. And how serious we, and frankly the state and federal governments are taking it. Having said that, we went through the testing and we had no additional persons – zero – all came back negative. Honestly I wasn't expecting that because the community infection rates are going up all over the place, and so just to be at that place to have that was really great. Can that be sustained? Probably not. But it was very interested to see that. I'd like to think, although we don't have scientific proof to back it up, wearing masks and appropriate PPE makes a difference. And so we do believe it does and we hope we never go back to the infection rates we had in April, May, and June. But I have to tell you, the numbers across the country and in Pennsylvania and are not looking good.

AM: I had an interesting conversation with our infection control nurse this morning, trying to understand as I get ready to send out an email to families in Health Care updating them on our situation – I wanted to make sure I know what is going on. When you hear there are two cases at Dock Woods, that starts to sound a little but concerning. But she was sharing that based on the contact tracing they did and the fact that those two employees never were in the building together at the same time, they really don't think the first employee gave the virus to the second employee. They think its two separate situations. And again like you said, hopefully the mask-wearing, the PPE really is making a difference.

EB: That's right. And it would appear, and we don't have 100% certainty, that they did not contract the virus within Living Branches. I don't know that we can ever say that with 100% certainty or without more research, but it would appear that it came from relationships outside. And so the positive of that is it feels like we're having some measure of – I don't even want to use the word control – but influence. But it really is important – and we're going to talk about this more in the video – to talk about the upcoming holidays, the things all of us do or don't do or shouldn't do with the upcoming holidays that really make a difference. Really make a difference.

AM: That's a great segue. You sent communication this week to all of our residents and their family members from yourself, Dr. Haimowitz, our medical director, and Dr. Rose at TriValley. So maybe we should talk a little about that.

EB: It was about being aware of what you were doing over these upcoming holidays – Thanksgiving and Christmas, who you were hanging with, and how many, and I know CMS is saying you shouldn't be having any family gatherings. I think I shared in the last video that Lucy was in charge of her family's gathering this year and it was cancelled. Some members of her family may have been like what's the big deal? On the other hand I can tell you that they come from central PA, Big Valley, and I know Valley View Haven is having a problem. I say this because I think it's public knowledge, not to out them or anything, because we've had problems, too. But they didn't have issues to date and now all of the sudden as of the other day I think they had 44 cases in Health Care.

AM: That's so hard.

EB: This is a place – let's just put it this way: mask wearing is not a popular activity in that neck of the woods. And I have family roots out there too from generations ago. The culture there is very independent, but it's really important to wear masks. I'm not saying for certain that was the issue there, we don't know. But it was a place that did not have the issues we did early on. And perhaps even thought they may be escaping it, just like North Dakota and South Dakota thought that. Now these are places that are really a hotbed with COVID. So we just need to pay attention. And if at all possible, that we not have those family gatherings this year, really, or have them small and know where people have been. And to do it that way. Because as Lucy heard on the radio, let's do the safe things this year so we're all around next year and can have our gatherings then. It's hard. I get it. It's really hard. But we really need to watch it. It's so easy, and I'll speak for myself, to get complacent. But we need to be disciplined, particularly at this time of the year. It is really, really important.

AM: I have an interesting conversation with a resident from Souderton Mennonite Homes who called asking for advice because she had family members who wanted to come visit her for Thanksgiving. And basically she didn't want them to come. Not that she didn't want to see them, of course, but she was very uncomfortable and they really wanted to come. So I was

brainstorming with her, some strategies that she could use to try and minimize her risk as much as possible. We talked about not serving a meal, and if they were going to eat, she should go in the other room while they eat. And above all they need to keep their masks on the entire time they are in her residence.

EB: Yeah, that's right. And the eating – it's one of the most unsafe things we can do with other people because we don't have our mask on, right? And when we're eating with each other, we're talking and things are moving around the room, shall we say. And so it's really important that we avoid those kinds of activities. Just to talk about some of the things I'm evaluating – I'm in local rotary club, I was President last year, and want to be supportive now that I'm past-President. I attended some meetings when we were outside and we do have zoom meetings. Now we're inside at the country club. I haven't been there yet and I'm not sure when I may go. If I go, I'm probably not going to be eating, just going for the program and wearing my mask. I say that not to be critical of the fact that they're meeting because people have to make their own choices, but for me, in the position I play in this organization and the example I want to be, and particularly now when the rates of infection are going up, we're in a challenging time and we need to pay attention very closely, in my opinion.

AM: An hour ago we got information from Montgomery County that they're closing schools for two weeks starting November 23rd. So yeah, if that's not a sign that infection rates are rising and they're taking things seriously, I don't know what is.

EB: That's right. And it really comes back to: we need to do the right thing now. Opening the economy and hitting coronavirus – these are not mutually exclusive, they're interconnected and related and I don't think we can – I'm not a believer that we can shut the economy down completely. I'm also a believer that we need to pay attention to the medical experts and we need to find that place that's going to have the best chance of success. It's not one or the other, it's both and. Because frankly if there's no economic activity, there's no money to pay for the care that needs to happen. So it needs to be a combination. For the most part our leaders are trying to do that. In the state, people have differing opinions on that. But I don't subscribe that our governor is trying to do things to shut down the economy. Why would you do that? You have no revenue coming in then if you do shut down, but it's really both and. How do we work together? And that's probably another point too – I spoke to that in the last video. We need to work together. Republicans and Democrats need to work together. This is not a one side or the other. This is together trying to figure this out and working together, not putting road blocks in – let's talk to each other, let's work it out, let's believe the best in each other and find ways that we can work together to get to the other side. Because that's really the only way we're going to do it.

AM: It's going to take all of us.

EB: That's right.

AM: Well we do have a request question this week. It's a simple one so I'm sure you'll like this. And the question is – of course I'm being facetious – How is Living Branches attempting to address the psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs of its residents, given the pandemic restrictions? Easy!

EB: Wow, you were being facetious. But it is an excellent question – it really is – because we really spend a lot of time looking at the physical well-being, and that's important. I mean if you pass on, those other things really don't matter, right? Having said that, keeping you alive physically and keeping your heart beating is not the only thing that defines life. I would say that has been one of the hardest things for the coronavirus response team – to work at that. Because you're trying to find balance, right? And I know there are families and residents who thought we were too tight or too loose. Both sides really. I've heard both. And I would say overall thought people have been very respectful. But it is hard, because that emotional connection with people is really important. I can say this: our staff have been doing a wonderful job with connecting with our residents. We just stopped our weekend coverage again. But two weeks ago I was on. And I happened to be at Dock Woods and The Willows. And staff were overall in positive spirits. And you could tell they really cared about the residents and they knew that for some of these residents, they were their connection. And so that is maybe, first and foremost, the direct caregivers – CNAs, nurses, dining services workers, housekeeping – anyone that is interacting, there's an opportunity for a connection to be made. That certainly was true pre-COVID, but it's really important now too. But we are doing music therapy in a safe manner. We have all kinds of different protocols to manage that in a good way. And that was quite the process to get there. Because singing without protection can be a challenge. So we've come up with a good plan. But that – Sunday services are happening, although in a small group, pastors are visiting, we use handheld devices to encourage people to visit their families, until we had these positive cases we had visits happening. So we're really trying to work at this stuff, because I suspect the person who asked this question had an underlying bias or thought that this is important, too, and they're absolutely right. And so we're trying to work at that within the regulatory constraints we have to work in, within safety protocols. But recognizing that it's not just about keeping one's heart beating. There's a whole lot more to life, right? So that's probably one of the hardest things that we've had to work through. And one of the saddest things, frankly. Because when we're making decisions in CRT, it pulls at our heartstrings, too. Because we have families, we have parents, we have grandparents. We know this is not easy. So we're weighing and balancing all of that. You may have other things to reflect on, too, because I know you're out and about as well and observing what's happening in that regard.

AM: You're right. I was at The Willows, actually, last week with Mike, our videographer, doing a photo shoot. And we stumbled across a music therapy session and had an interesting conversation with the intern running that therapy session. I love talking to the interns because they're not necessarily long term at our organization. They're students, so they're here for a semester or two and they get around to the different campuses and see who's here. And this intern was reflecting that he was seeing such a marked difference between the last couple of

weeks and now these couple of weeks because The Willows had come out of its pandemic protocols. We had a positive test and so they were not able to meet in groups and things like that, until recently when they had come back out of that. It was just so fun. All of the residents had an instrument. Everyone was playing and happy and it was just so nice to see that. And the intern was reflecting how thankful he was to be part of that process and that event, to bring joy to people. And so it reassures me when I come out of our CRT meetings and the other things we do here in this building, to make it back to campus to see that life is still going on there. Not exactly the same way it was before.

EB: Yeah, not anywhere close.

AM: Yeah. But there's still a lot of joy.

EB: And maybe you can speak briefly, too, about what are some of the creative approaches that we're using for music therapy to keep it safe but let it happen.

AM: Well one of the things we've all realized is that once you've put a face mask on someone and then put a face shield on, it becomes increasingly difficult to hear them speaking. So we've purchased amplification devices. They're actually like what tour guides have, so a little microphone (gestures over the ear) and a pocket amplifier. It really does allow whoever is speaking to speak in a much louder voice. So that's very helpful. And then of course the residents are all wearing masks. And at this particular session, there was one resident who was not terribly excited about wearing the mask, but there was a caregiver there who was making sure that everyone was keeping it on. And most people we're trying hard to do that. And of course, everything is sanitized after they use it. Everyone is sitting six to eight feet apart from each other. And everyone is singing softly. When you start doing research into singing, as we now know from CRT, its volume. So speaking loudly or shouting is no worse than singing softly. So it's the projection and the level of volume. So all of those things are taking place and we do feel pretty confident that it's a safe activity.

EB: That's very helpful. Because it also gives people watching the video a sense of the thought process that you need to put into these things to get to the place to actually do what is helpful but keep it safe while you do it.

AM: It's very enjoyable to go to campus and still see great things happening. You had a great idea. It's called, "Christmas in March!" Would you care to share?

EB: Christmas in March? I've heard of Christmas in July but what I was talking about and I referenced this earlier – be safe this year so you can all be around to be together next year. And

you know, I know the day of a holiday is like Thanksgiving day – that’s Thanksgiving. But I remember when I got married. I was the youngest in my family and the last to get married. My mom loved to get together on the holidays but she also realized that in addition to four children there were four in-laws. And so you can’t always get what you want. I think there was a song in the 60s about that. And so you have to say, is it about the day of? Or is it about being together? And I think we need to say it’s about being together at some point hence when we can be safe and we can have turkey in March. We might have difficulty getting a fresh turkey from Bolton’s in March, but it’s about being together, right? Based on some stories I hear from some families, some people might be just as happy not to be together with their family this year. I mean talk about stress-filled holidays – I’m being facetious, but that is the reality in some cases. But let’s be safe now so we can be together later. And let’s celebrate Christmas in March, or maybe not even then, it might be Christmas in July. But the point is, let’s focus on what we can do and how we can be creative with it, as opposed to what we’ve lost. And I think that’s a critical piece of resilience. To focus on what you still have and can do. There was a story on TV the other night about this person in the military who had his legs blown off in Afghanistan, and through yoga – he became a yoga instructor and that really made a difference in his life but he connected with other people, and I’m sure he would prefer to have his legs, but he’s never getting them back so he had to come to terms with that and he found ways to make his life incredibly meaningful. It was a very moving story. And whenever I see things like that, I’m like wow, hmm, interesting. Whatever our stage in life, we need to figure out how are we going to see what we have. Both Lucy and I have lost siblings to automobile accidents. In my case it was my brother and sister-in-law – it was many years ago, but at that point in time, you have to grieve and go through the stages, but then to focus on hope for the future and the opportunities. And for us, it was their two kids who still were with us. So you have to focus on what you have. I really do believe that’s so important. And I’ll speak for myself – it’s easy to focus on what you’ve lost. I’m not saying it’s easy to do or I do it perfectly, but I’ve found in my life it’s a mindset change and we need to focus on what we have.

AM: This ties in beautifully to our Montessori principles – a focus on what you have, what you can do, not what you can’t do.

EB: That’s right. And I’d love to see my in-laws and whole family together this year. But I’d really prefer to have my in-laws around the next time we’re all together, so what can we do to be safe?

AM: Good advice. Thank you, Ed. Thank you for watching. We’ll be back in two weeks. In the meantime, if you have questions please feel free to email them to coronavirusquestions@livingbranches.org. Thank you!