

Transcript
Coronavirus Q & A – Episode 55
May 11, 2022



Alex Metricarti: Hello! I'm Alex Metricarti, chief marketing and public relations officer for Living Branches. Today is Wednesday, May 11, and I'm here today with Ed Brubaker, Living Branches President/CEO. Welcome!

Edward Brubaker: Good afternoon, Alex.

AM: It felt a little strange to say Wednesday.

EB: Yeah, that's right. You're used to saying Friday.

AM: Or at least Monday! We've been doing that, too. Well – we're here, and unfortunately we get to talk about Covid again. I was thinking that maybe we would avoid that, but we absolutely are experiencing some cases on our campus. So from a count perspective, right now there are two residents at Dock Acres in Dock Woods who are testing positive, and three staff persons at Dock Woods who are testing positive. At Souderton right now, we have eight persons in the Residential Living apartments who are positive; one person in a cottage; one person in a villa; then two staff persons. No one at The Willows, and so we are seeing a bit of resurgence and that seems to match what's going on in our local community, as we've talked about many times before.

EB: Yeah, that's right. We mirror what happens out there. It's interesting, though, that we – right now and it could change tomorrow – have more Residential Living, and specifically at Souderton, than we do amongst staff. So that has not typically been the case in the past, but it's the ongoing reality of the disease. As our residents are out and about more, maybe our staff have immunity because of having Covid, or because of the vaccine; it's so many different variables. But yes – right now the fortunate thing is that the situation in most cases are still rather light symptoms. However with that said, we have had some staff (or I shouldn't say "some staff," I know at least one staff member) who had some more heavy symptoms with this. It's continued to be variable, but it does seem like it's creeping up a bit.

AM: It might be worth it to mention to people – and I've lost track of the people who've tested positive and said, "Oh I thought it was just a cold," or "I thought it was just allergies." Because the symptoms really seem to mimic that.

EB: Right, and the allergies have been a recent one. That would make sense, too, because it's allergy season, and so you're out and about – so allergies are happening and you could pass it off as that. It's not always that case.

AM: Yeah. So if you're a resident and you have the sniffles, don't hesitate to contact your Residential Living nurse to arrange for testing. Better safe than sorry, I think, at this point! Especially because you were just mentioning earlier that there is a local hospital that is seeing an increase in hospitalizations again.

EB: Yeah again the numbers are still low compared to what they have been in the past. I think Grand View had zero patients, I was being told a few weeks ago – Covid positive patients – and as of yesterday had six. That is not a huge number compared to what it has been in the past; it's gone into the 30s and in the 40s, but it is more than what they had recently. So that's another number that is really important for us to watch. That is: Covid hospital admissions, and also ICU admissions for Covid.

AM: When I've been on campus in the last couple of days, I've had a couple of Residential Living residents ask me sort of...I feel like they're waiting for the other shoe to drop. So they're seeing these case counts going up again, and they're wondering when we are going to be tightening restrictions.

EB: Yeah, and that's an interesting question. I can certainly understand the concern, because that would mirror what we've done in the past. There's been some things that have been changing in that regard, specifically in regard to the positivity rate. The number of tests – particularly negative tests – that are now being reported to governmental agencies for looking at positivity rates...we don't have to report our negative tests anymore. And so if you know anything about mathematics, you know if the denominator goes down but the numerator stays the same, the percentage goes up. So that is impacting us right now. The reality, though, is we still have the positivity rate plus the rate per hundred-thousand still dictates what we need to do in Health Care – so our testing protocols for staff, etc. The combination of that positivity rate and that rate per hundred-thousand determines whether we're in high transmission, substantial transmission: the different layers we have, and those correspond to how often we need to test. I'm hoping that at some point the state and feds will change that review structure, because it's not making quite as much sense as it used to. But the reality is: that's what we have. The other reality is that case counts are creeping up, but the positivity rate is maybe a more variable rate anymore as far as review of it. But that's how we're still looking at testing. With that said, as we think about Residential Living, there's another kind of website that's out there at CMS that looks at community transmission, and so everybody other than Health Care looks at that to determine if you're in low, substantial, or high. That looks at a lot of different factors, one of them being hospital admissions, ICU admissions, etc., and so that is probably the criteria we will look more closely at when we think about Residential. Because if the symptoms remain relatively light, there's no reason to go into – from my perspective – into the full out “lock down” mode anymore. But if the ICU admissions and hospital admissions go up, which tend to indicate that the seriousness is going up again, then that's something to pay attention to. Right now fortunately in Montgomery County, PA: that's not happening right now, but it is something we will look at. So to summarize all that, we're looking at statistics a little bit differently now, partly because the severity of the illness – at least at this point – seems to be less. Frankly no one knows where we're going and where we'll be in the future, so we take it day by day and week by week, and fortunately that's where we're at at the moment.

AM: Maybe just for clarity: I thought I heard you say that for Residential Living, the data that we were looking at is on the CMS website, but I think it should be the CDC website.

EB: That's right; you are correct. It is CDC, and that is the website for that. Correct.

AM: You can tell marketing people did not come up with the name for those websites because it's too confusing. Too close together!

EB: Well I think the name of the actual webpage is a little similar too, so it does get confusing at times. Again it would be the CDC website.

AM: Well let's maybe talk about something maybe a little more fun than Covid. Let's talk about construction. Especially at Dock Woods, we're getting close to seeing shovels in the ground or that type of thing.

EB: Yes we are moving forward, and our targeted date is Monday, June 13 to actually start at the Dock Woods campus. That's when they hope to be moving in, and there may even be work before that with some tree removal and some other work that's being done. But we have some things we need to make sure the paperwork is all, you know – T's crossed, I's dotted, all those sorts of things – so we're working at that these next couple of weeks to make sure everything is in as needed with the township. But we do anticipate that that will be the date we start there. We are not planning to have any kind of major groundbreaking there; it'll be more of a low-key, perhaps an ice cream, event on that campus just to kind of mark the day or the week before we'll probably do it. That's when we're looking to get started. Later this month, since Souderton is starting later in the year, that's when we'll have some meetings with Souderton residents to review what's happening at that campus. So that will be later in May. We anticipate Souderton starting later in the year, and we don't have an exact dates for that because we still need to get our approvals from the township. We're hoping for late summer or fall, but that has yet to be determined as far as starting date. So yeah: things are happening! And it's exciting to anticipate this coming together.

AM: It might be worth it just for us to talk briefly because we are now getting ready for construction very, very soon...we're in the stage of planning where we're reducing the number of available beds at Dock Terrace. This impacts all of our residents from the perspective of if people need short-term rehab, we do not have beds available right now.

EB: Yeah, that's right. We at the Dock Woods campus need to go from a census – or possible census – of 72 down to 54. Now the reality is, we haven't been running at 72, so it's not like we're going from 72 to 54; it's maybe 68 or 66. That still takes effort to do that, and we need to stop bringing people in from the wider community, etc. and working at those things. Those plans are already in motion. We have had some people who were amenable to moving to Souderton or back to Souderton in some cases, and so we needed to work at that. We do anticipate over time during construction, we'll kind of settle into a new normal with the new bed count. Because actually as we studied what the bed count was that we needed per campus, it was not at 71 and 72; it was actually 45 to 47. So the point is: we will still have technically what would appear to be more beds than, on average, we need even at the lowered bed count to care for our residents. But to get to that point, it will make a difference. So we really appreciate the work that staff has been doing to get to that point, but also the residents and families and their understanding because regardless of whether you know it's going to be a good outcome, it's still a stressor to move, and to change venues, and to change your home. We do recognize that, but we're also so very excited about the opportunities that this construction will bring to us, and really improve life on the campuses.

AM: I am in meetings where we talk about this process and how we're doing this. In a marketing role, I have something to do with admissions into Health Care. So far I don't believe that there's anyone who is a resident anywhere at the Living Branches continuing care retirement community, or life plan community, that's needed short-term rehab that we've had to go to another organization. But it has been touch-and-go down to the day, so I think part of it – just for me – is I want people to be aware that this is a possibility in the immediate future, just because it never feels good to have to do that.

EB: Yeah, that's right. And we'll want to be trying to work with organizations that our like-minded to us in terms of care and philosophies of care, and that kind of thing. We're hoping to keep that to a minimum, but we can't promise that it won't happen. Because as we work at this details, it might need to happen from time to time. Persons on the Souderton campus will remember, years ago, that happened quite regularly before we had an additional 10 beds there, so that was more of an experience at Souderton. However it's happened at Dock Woods as well, so again like you said we'll try to keep it to a minimum. But we do appreciate people's understanding as we go through this process of getting where we want to be.

AM: It's going to be so great to be there. Any final thoughts for us today?

EB: Yeah as I was thinking about this related to construction, there was an announcement. We didn't make a formal organization announcement, and I'm not sure if you put it in Branching Out because of the deadlines for putting things in Branching Out, but we did get a \$2 million RACP grant for Souderton Mennonite Homes. RACP is essential capital improvement monies. Clemens Food Group had gotten some monies from there, Peter Becker, Elm Terrace – just naming some local facilities that have in the last year/year-and-a-half gotten some funding from that. We applied about a year ago, and we didn't get any allocation from the December allocation...last December. So I was thinking, "Well we were just passed over," but a few weeks ago, Representative Steve Malagari called me late on a Friday night/Friday afternoon, and said, "Hey good news! Can you call me back?" I thought maybe this was what it was about, but he let me know that we did get this grant, which is wonderful. There's paperwork as you might imagine with governmental funding that we'll need to go through, and there are T's we need to cross and I's we'll need to dot. But it is a really nice opportunity for us. I won't go into all the details, but it really is – because of how the funding mechanisms are set up we did not apply at Dock Woods because that region did not have availability. Where Souderton is, they had availability for these grants. Again won't go into all those details there because it might make it even more confusing. The point is just to clarify why we got it at Souderton, and we didn't apply at Dock Woods. It was because it wasn't available, but we're really appreciative to Representative Malagari, and also to Senator Maria Collett who would have advocated for us as well. We're very pleased that we were able to get that; it helps pay for some of the project and also allows us to accommodate some of the increased costs that were anticipated, too, along the way. We're very pleased with that, and very appreciative for that; it's some very good news we just got in the last two weeks.

AM: Yeah, that's exciting! It's nice to feel like local government is working for you.

EB: Yeah. That's right, and Representative Malagari – he really...I appreciate his work and he's very focused on the local community. I don't want to get into which party and all those kind of

things, because that tends to be a little silly sometimes in politics. At the end of the day, politicians are our representatives to work on our behalf, and from my perspective he does a very nice job.

AM: That's good. Thank you!

EB: Thank you.

AM: Thank you to you for watching. If you have questions for a future episode, please feel free to send them to coronavirusquestions@livingbranches.org. I suppose I should say your questions don't necessarily have to do with Coronavirus anymore, but you're welcome to send them in. We'll see you a future date. Thank you!