

**T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection**

**ABSTRACT**

**INTERVIEWEE NAMES:** Chuck Spicer, Ryan Cross, Mark Rudison, Kristian Smith, Stephanie Manson

**COLLECTION:** 4700.3201

**IDENTIFICATION:** Chuck Spicer, CEO of Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center; Ryan Cross, vice president of governmental affairs and advocacy of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System; Mark Rudison, operations manager of environmental sciences at Our Lady of the Lake; Kristian Smith, director of health and safety at the OLOL; Stephanie Manson, chief operating officer of Our Lady of the Lake Health

**INTERVIEWER:** Alyson Neel

**SERIES:** Our Lady of the Lake, "Under Pressure: A Louisiana Hospital's COVID-19 Experience"

**INTERVIEW DATE:** August 26, 2024

**FOCUS DATES:** 2020-2022

**ABSTRACT:**

**Tape 5258**

Introductions and job titles; each participant describes how they came to work in healthcare; each describes their day-to-day work before the pandemic; COVID required all hands on deck; Rudison explains role of environmental sciences department; Cross describes changes in marketing department due to COVID; Cross walked through the care units every day during pandemic; 100% of Cross' communications work was about the pandemic; huge surge in media requests; ebb and flow of media interest; meetings changed from in-person to Zoom; Manson describes how all the hospital's attention switched to COVID focus; staffing during pandemic; Smith describes her work as head of employee health, infection prevention and clinical quality and patient safety; struggle to get effective PPE; testing and treating infected team members; Spicer was in Oklahoma City during pandemic; pivotal moment for Spicer was in March 2020 when NBA game was cancelled because a patient tested positive for COVID; Spicer's work on finding supplies; Spicer much prefers in-person over virtual contact, but became cautious during pandemic like everyone else; Manson helped develop a screening app to make sure staff members were healthy; Smith talks about campaign to promote better handwashing; constant changes to protocol and best practices; challenge of compound infections; educating staff on

better use of PPE and other preventative measures; people needed reassurance during this scary time; keeping family members safe; Rudison describes himself as a guinea pig, one of the first to get vaccinated; he lost some of his staff because they were afraid of the virus; “Titles was out the door... whatever you had to do, you had to do it... So everybody got on board. When they saw leaders stepping up, doing the same job that they was doing, it made a difference.”; Black Louisianians were dying of Covid at a higher rate due to having multiple health problems, and were also afraid of the vaccine; “I mean, we all know what happened, you know, back in the day, you know, at Tuskegee and things of that nature.”; Black healthcare leaders educated the wider Black community about the virus and the vaccine; some staff members were afraid the vaccine would kill them; it was hard on the caregivers to see so many people dying of COVID; Spicer talks about the difference between rural and urban perspectives on COVID in Oklahoma City; discrimination against healthcare workers in Oklahoma City; staff who lost family members to COVID were terrified of working; use of faith in allaying staff fears; overflowing morgue; feelings about the new vaccine; Smith wanted to be informed about the shot because she would be administering it to people; importance of hope; coinciding with new vaccine: “And it just so happened that was the first year in like 700 years that the Christmas star was visible in the sky. And for some reason that spoke to me like... that was hope in a time of Christ, and it's happening again.”; staff members trusted Dr. O’Neal’s lead on vaccine; Spicer describes losing his friend Luke Letlow to COVID, which made him more open to getting vaccine; reasons that people were skeptical of vaccine; Cross talks about communicating the data to the public that the vaccine would save lives; connection between media appearances and increase in vaccine appointments; politicization of vaccine; commitment to educate people that vaccine saved lives, despite negative press and misinformation campaigns; Smith talks about educating people on reliable sources; when Louisiana mandated that healthcare workers must be vaccinated or have a valid religious or medical exemption; similar to flu vaccine mandate; mistrust due to newness of COVID vaccine; Dr. O’Neal’s leadership; Spicer remembers the festive atmosphere at Children’s Hospital in OKC when the vaccine became available; Spicer says people tend to remember the negatives, but banding together with other people sustained him; what it was like to have friends and relatives downplaying COVID and vaccination even while Cross saw people rapidly dying in the hospital; area hospitals paid for billboards showing ICU bed counts and vaccination status; “And the numbers were a very compelling story and something you really couldn't argue with.”; partnership between OLOL and Southern University; OLOL doctors went on Southern University campus to vaccinate students; Manson talks about how the pandemic helped her team learn to communicate better, starting with a daily huddle; Spicer learned more about his own mental health and that of his colleagues during the pandemic; Manson feels the pandemic made OLOL more collaborative; Cross learned about the importance of communicating concise, truthful messages despite barrage of media and divided opinions; Rudison stresses importance of faith and working together; the hero walk, when people lined up to cheer on recovered COVID patients as they left the hospital; Cross describes setting up a testing site at Baton Rouge General’s north campus; Manson remembers the joy of finding a surgery center that would share its PPE; Spicer talks about the importance of the staff being there for each other.

**TAPE:** # (T5258)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 2 minutes

**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT:** 37

**OTHER MATERIALS:** narrator corrections

**RESTRICTIONS:** None