

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAMES: Jim Teague, Emily Johnston, Christi Pierce, Shantelle Graves

COLLECTION: 4700.3199

IDENTIFICATION: Jim Teague, laboratory director; Emily Johnston, critical care clinical pharmacist; Christi Pierce, chief operating officer of Our Lady of Lourdes Health vice president of quality and safety at Our Lady Lake Regional Medical Center, and Shantelle Graves, senior director of respiratory care.

INTERVIEWER: Alyson Neel

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

INTERVIEW DATE: July 11, 2024

FOCUS DATES: 2020-2022

ABSTRACT:

Tape 5256

Introductions; Johnston describes how she chose to go into pharmacy; her pharmacy training; Graves explains how she fell into the respiratory care field; Pierce began her studies in business, before switching to health administration; Teague on working in a lab: "And we also say that in the lab we want to help people, but we don't necessarily want to touch them."; lab people enjoy solving puzzles; Teague's role was mostly administrative pre-COVID; during COVID, his role and his work hours expanded; the year went by in a blur; Pierce talks about how her data analytics team refocused its work during COVID; before COVID, Graves worked closely with her team, starting each day with an in-person huddle; during COVID, switch to virtual meetings full of COVID updates; sourcing ventilators and other supply chain troubles; measures to keep respiratory care staff safe when venting patients; Johnston was just starting her career in critical care pharmacy before COVID; her work week shot up to seven days; medication shortage; becoming aware of the virus; Teague talks about the challenges of creating a BSL-3 lab suitable for testing for coronavirus; doubts that COVID would spread to the US; then people started showing up at the hospital to be tested for COVID; staff's fear of catching COVID from patients; Graves notes Friday, March 13, 2020 as beginning of staff hysteria; two or three brave members of the respiratory staff volunteered to take care of the first patients; Pierce still keeps a spreadsheet with the names of their first COVID patients; in the first five weeks of COVID in Louisiana, the River Road testing lab did almost four thousand tests; inhouse testing of staff;

Teague had never seen the ER so full; separating COVID cases from other patients; staff who worked in the COVID unit stayed there, not roaming around or eating in cafeteria; getting food delivery; precautions to keep family members safe at home; staying away from older family members; Pierce says they were at the hospital from before daylight to after sunset, and she didn't know how her husband and kids were coping with online work and school at home; "I found that I had to be kind of a voice of truth, like this is what the news said. But let me tell you what's going on."; Teague didn't see his elderly mother for almost a year; Graves talks about hunting for supplies at night and on weekends; for months, Johnston did nothing but work or think about COVID; Pierce talks about visiting the vet school as it was getting the testing lab up and running; helping to put test kits together; Teague talks about why the vet school was chosen for the testing lab; lab requirements under Clinical Laboratory Improvement Act (CLIA); getting sped-up CLIA approval; suddenly everybody thought they were lab experts; Pierce recounts the story of anxiously delivering one of the first samples to the state testing lab; Pierce had to deliver COVID test results to OLOL staff; Teague talks about having to stack bodies in the morgue to fit them all in; refrigerated morgue trucks; "We had that refrigerated cooler out back for eighteen months."; Graves talks about when pipes froze because of overuse of oxygen for respiratory devices; had to increase the diameter of piping to ICU and bring in an 18-wheeler oxygen deliver truck; names the many ventilators and other oxygen devices they needed to run simultaneously; initial feelings about vaccine availability—hope and skepticism; Johnston talks about the difficulties of ramping up pharmaceutical care for patients so quickly; Graves talks about need to add unknown, unvetted contract staff to keep up with patient load; emotional stress on staff of overwork and watching many of their patients die alone; helping patients FaceTime with families; Pierce's biggest challenge was sustaining care despite the surge of patients; Teague's biggest challenge in the lab was juggling different platforms and keeping up with regulatory oversight; he describes these lab platforms and procedures; camaraderie during pandemic; celebrating patients who were discharged; morbid humor as a protective mechanism; traveling nurses told Graves that it was the most organized department and hospital they'd ever been in; bonding with coworkers.

TAPE: 1 (T5256)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 59 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 27

OTHER MATERIALS: None

RESTRICTIONS: None