

Transcript of Interview with Christina Mena by Cristal R. Mendez

Interviewee: Christina Mena

Interviewer: Cristal R. Mendez

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Location (Interviewee): San Antonio, Texas

Location (Interviewer):

Abstract: Christina Mena, a nurse in San Antonio, shares her experiences of working in a cardiac clinic during the pandemic.

Cristal R. Mendez 00:02

Okay, Christina. Tell us about yourself.

Christina Mena 00:07

Okay. I am 38 years old. I live in San Antonio. I am a nurse. I've been a nurse for about 10 years I think, and I currently work in a cardiac clinic. My favorite Bette Midler song is "Wind Beneath My Wings."

Cristal R. Mendez 00:32

Excellent choice. And what kind of patients do you work with?

Christina Mena 00:39

The majority of our patients are cardiac patients, and they range from, I think 18 is one of our youngest patients, but the majority of them are probably in their 40s, 50s. I think the oldest one is maybe like 104. We do- it's mostly a lot of older patients. They're all patients that have either had cardiac issues or some sort of heart attack or just some sort of issue with their heart in general, or just needing follow-up, because maybe they have a history of cardiac problems.

Cristal R. Mendez 01:18

Okay. And so how is your clinic staying connected with these patients right now?

Christina Mena 01:27

So in the beginning we started off- I mean, when it first hit and things got really bad we were seeing maybe like, nobody was really wanting to come in. So a lot of the patients were canceling. Then we started figuring out how to try to figure it out, how to do telehealth. Since the government is now, I guess, allowing it, and we can charge for it. So right now, we're mainly seeing patients, either through like Google Duo, Zoom, FaceTime. We're even offering phone, especially for some of the older patients that either don't have any type of smart phones or devices. So that's how we're right now trying to do most of our visits. For a while there, it was like 100% of our visits were like that, then things kind of slowed down as far as cases. So we

started picking up with patients coming in. Now it's a little bit of both. We see maybe like 70% telehealth and then the rest come in for their visits.

Cristal R. Mendez 02:42

So, has this transition of talking to your patients over the phone and through video chat- Has it posed any new challenges; has it been a smooth transition?

Christina Mena 02:57

In the beginning it was really hard because I think since the majority of our patients are older they weren't used to dealing with FaceTime, even though they may have had an Apple phone. Zoom I think was fairly new for all of us, including myself. So it was a lot of learning in the beginning and having to call patients ahead of time so that we can- walking through them, the whole steps of how to set up FaceTime, how to use it. So I think in the beginning it was it was hard. Now that we're seeing already patients that, you know, we saw six months ago because normally we'll see patients every six months and those patients are already comfortable with doing it because they've had multiple visits with multiple doctors. So it's become a little bit easier as far as that goes. We still see a lot of new patients or patients that are having issues that can't be done over telehealth, so they'll come in. So that's nice to have that both telehealth and both having them come in. And I think it's been real helpful for a lot of patients. Some patients we see come from like Del Rio or Laredo, even Boerne. And so I think some of them really enjoy not having to fight through traffic or just being able to have that connection with the doctor and have him go over stuff, and if they have any issues, then of course, we can always bring them in, but a lot of the patients, I think prefer the telehealth, especially some of our older ones that are kind of at risk. Or even some of them that are battling cancer. It's just- it's nice to have both.

Cristal R. Mendez 04:50

Okay. And how do you feel health experts in San Antonio have been handling the pandemic?

Christina Mena 05:00

I feel- I feel for the most part, that everything has been handled pretty well. I mean, it's so new, it's such a new—it's something like yes, we saw New York doing it, , facing it before us. So I feel like we've--That was kind of to our advantage because we were able to kind of see what they were doing it and how they were doing it and dealing with stuff. But I feel for the most part we have handled it pretty well. I also work part time in the hospital. So during this whole time I've worked maybe a couple of times, but not really having to deal with COVID patients. So I know in the hospital- the hospital that I worked at, they built like, they completely separated it from the generalized patients until at one point, they took over the whole floor so it's been interesting to see how everybody has handled it. Whether in the hospital or in our clinic, there was constant changes going on, constant revisions of how we should be doing things when we should be doing it and even now, I think there's always questions of, , okay, this patient traveled, should they really be coming into the clinic or it's just kind of what's the word like they're... Like it's just constant change when it comes to what we're doing. Yeah.

Cristal R. Mendez 06:44

Okay. And so are there any advantages or disadvantages of being a nurse in San Antonio, aside from maybe San Antonio handling it well? What about the community. Have you had support from them, or from your patients? What are some advantages and disadvantages of being a nurse, particularly here in San Antonio?

Christina Mena 07:15

Um, well, I mean like the- I think for the most part our city has handled it very well compared to some of the other bigger cities that have had pretty big outbreaks. I think for a while there when we started spiking up in July, people saw, Hey if we really do listen to what people are telling us to do as far as social distancing washing our hands wearing masks, not having family get together, and that the numbers could go down and they saw that they went down. So I think the fact that people actually paid attention and I guess, for the most part, because I feel like other places have maybe had more issues with I guess some of this stuff being politicized. And of course we're not like some of those bigger cities where we're so densely populated where we can't social distance. So I think there has been some advantages for us that we're not having to deal with some of the other places, especially like I think, it's what- El Paso right now that seeing these huge outbreaks. So I can only imagine being a nurse there where the hospitals are at capacity and you're having to move patients out. I think it's also different working and the fact that I work in a clinic and not so much in the hospital. And so not being having that one on one with patients. I did think during this time that I had wanted to go back to the hospital to help, but then I think I realized that even though I'm not on the complete frontline that I'm still doing some sort of good work by helping to keep these patients that we care for- not having to- not having to have them going to the hospital for certain things, making sure that their blood pressure's controlled, and a lot of it has been helping them mentally. I'm just giving them a call, especially for a couple of our patients that we know that don't have family or don't have children. I try and give them a call at least every two weeks just to kind of check on them and make sure that they're okay. So I guess that's my input I guess on helping out.

Cristal R. Mendez 09:54

And for the people that you can't reach, that you can't help out, what advice would you give them? What can you advise your patients or the community to do to maintain their health? Not just with coronavirus but their health in general, you know, trying to keep them from going to the doctor, having emergencies, and trying to stay away from the hospital.

Christina Mena 10:20

I guess just making sure that you're being proactive when it comes to your health. You know, if you have problems with high blood pressure and making sure that you're taking your medications if you're diabetic. Making sure that you're eating healthy. I know when I'm there in the visits with my doctor he's always stressing, make sure you're staying active, even if it's only for 30 minutes or doing some sort of activity and not being so sedentary. Also finding something

that you like to do, some sort of hobby. For us in the beginning, since a lot of this happened during spring time we took advantage by staying out in the garden and planting. Like we had no idea what the heck we were doing, or if anything would even grow, but that kept our minds I think occupied and it helped us, I guess, wanting to learn more about different stuff as far as growing goes. So I think that that's very important just finding something that you like to do, whether or not reading drawing or, find a new hobby. There's so many things out there right now that are offering free courses or even courses where you don't even have to pay that much, but you still get so much out of it. So I think that's, that's really important, just staying active and keeping your mind active.

Cristal R. Mendez 11:57

Excellent advice and so I have one last question, and that's if say there- hopefully there wouldn't be, but in the future if there was another pandemic, what advice would you give to a nurse in San Antonio?

Christina Mena 12:22

That you got this. It may seem hard in the beginning, and you may be anxious about it. But regardless of everything else that may be going on you're still always going to have people that you can depend on whether it be your family, your friends, co-workers that will help you get through this. And just prepare for the worst but expect the best to come out. I think that's how it goes. How does it go? [laughs]

Cristal R. Mendez 13:01

I think you just made up your own phrase, but that's okay. [both laugh] Do you have anything else that you would like to add about your experience during this time as a nurse?

Christina Mena 13:14

I honestly felt- or sometimes feel a little guilty because I really do feel sometimes that I'm not on the front lines. But I was telling my husband, the other day we had a patient come in, and he had just got really devastating news so that- he needed this life saving surgery and so I remember I was in the room talking to him and his wife, and he- we saw him as a follow up a couple of days ago, and he just came in and he was like, "I just want to thank you 'cause I don't remember if you- I don't know if you remember, but when I was in here you reached over and you, you touched me- you touched my hand," and he said that he felt like the whole world had just gotten lifted off his shoulders, so I think- I think it's those- that human touch and that connectedness that we have that we sometimes forget we have I guess so much power. And so it's just remaining human through all this and that everybody is going through- through it all, so I think that's what- what has also helped to that we're all going through it at the same time. It's not just, oh this one area of the country, it's literally the whole world.

Cristal R. Mendez 14:47

Yeah. I do find comfort in that shared experience that everyone's going through. So it's hard to feel sorry for yourself when your neighbor is going through the same thing. So, alright. Well, thank you for sharing your perspective, and I'm gonna stop the recording now. Thank you.

Christina Mena 15:08

Okay.