

Transcription of Interview with Tiffany Asher by Rebecca Olson

Interviewee: Tiffany Asher

Interviewer: Rebecca Olson

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Location: Wrenshall, MN

Transcriber: Rebecca Olson

Abstract: Tiffany Asher is a 26 year old, wife, and mother of two. She lives in Wrenshall, MN, which is located in Northeastern Minnesota. She was born with Cystic Fibrosis, a terminal illness. Despite her illness, and the danger it puts her in; she chooses to take care of residents who are suffering from COVID-19.

Rebecca Olson 00:01

Hello, my name is Rebecca Olson, and today I will be interviewing Tiffany Asher about her work and her health. Tiffany, can you tell us about your health condition and what your, are your everyday symptoms?

Tiffany Asher 00:17

Well, my cystic fibrosis everyday symptoms are coughing, body aches, wheezing, you know, all fun stuff.

Rebecca Olson 00:31

Growing up, did your condition affect your everyday life at all?

Tiffany Asher 00:34

Oh, yeah. Yeah, I wasn't allowed to have sleepovers with friends, go out and do stuff. I wasn't allowed to actually, actually, like, go out in the snow. If it was 50 degrees or lower. I wasn't allowed to be outside. It was literally 90 degrees or higher. I wasn't allowed outside either.

Rebecca Olson 00:49

Oh my gosh.

Tiffany Asher 00:49

Because it affects the lungs.

Rebecca Olson 00:51

Right. So could you play sports or anything?

Tiffany Asher 00:54

I was in cheerleading and volleyball, but very limited because the lungs. I always got put in the hospital. I was in the hospital three, four times a year for weeks on end. I would miss a lot of holidays.

Rebecca Olson 01:05

Yeah. Dang.

Tiffany Asher 01:14

Yeah. like Christmas. I'd be in the hospital from about, let's say December 21st to after New Year's Day. Oh, yeah.

Rebecca Olson 01:15

That's sad. As an adult, do you feel as if cystic fibrosis holds you back at all?

Tiffany Asher 01:18

Oh yeah. It does. With CF [Cystic Fibrosis] since there is a, it's a terminal illness and having a life expectancy, I mean, I don't really see the future, which is sad.

Rebecca Olson 01:34

Right.

Tiffany Asher 01:35

But I don't because I mean, it's a terminal illness. I feel like, you know, what, some days I feel like, what's the point of putting my foot forward and, you know, furthering my education, but other days, I'm like, you know what, I need to do this, so I can show my kids like, you know, you can do it.

Rebecca Olson 01:50

Right. Do the doctors, like, have a guess on your life expectancy or does it change?

Tiffany Asher 01:56

40.

Rebecca Olson 01:56

40?

Tiffany Asher 01:57

40.

Rebecca Olson 01:58

And how old are you?

Tiffany Asher 01:59

26.

Rebecca Olson 02:03

Could you please tell us about what you do for work and what kind of facility employs you?

Tiffany Asher 02:09

I am a CAN, and I work at a long term care facility for elders.

Rebecca Olson 02:17

Okay. And how often do you work?

Tiffany Asher 02:20

I'm full time. So, about 40 hours a week, you know, more than that, if I get mandated.

Rebecca Olson 02:27

And why do you sometimes get mandated?

Tiffany Asher 02:29

Not enough workers.

Rebecca Olson 02:31

Is it, like, because they're not scheduled or is it because of the virus?

Tiffany Asher 02:36

Not scheduled. And a lot of people just kind of, you know, because a virus, they just don't want to be in that, you know, you don't want to work there.

Rebecca Olson 02:42

Yeah. Yeah. What happens if an employee starts showing symptoms of COVID-19?

Tiffany Asher 02:50

Well, there have been, actually, so I mean, they kind of - we've been getting tested twice a week. Monday and Fridays, every week, since it started. And they are literally taken off the schedule. And we have to make up their, obviously, so we get mandated. But if they start showing symptoms, they're out of the building for, you know, 14 days. Until another test comes back negative.

Rebecca Olson 03:15

Okay. Why did you choose to work on a COVID floor?

Tiffany Asher 03:21

Truthfully, because not a lot of people want to do it because they don't want to risk it. And I mean, why not? I see what's happening. Help them. I mean, it's not their fault they got COVID.

Rebecca Olson 03:31

Yeah.

Tiffany Asher 03:32

So...

Rebecca Olson 03:34

What's the best part of working on a COVID floor? [Baby crying]

Tiffany Asher 03:37

Seeing them recover. Getting better, really. Seeing them from like, day one to like, the end of it and everything. You know, just because like on our COVID floor, only one CNA can work on it. So, when that one CNA works there, you're pretty much being the life of them because they're stuck in their room. They can't do anything.

Rebecca Olson 03:59

Right. You're the only person they see.

Tiffany Asher 04:00

Yes.

Rebecca Olson 04:00

Besides the nurse.

Tiffany Asher 04:01

Yep.

Rebecca Olson 04:02

Okay. What do you think the worst part is, or, I mean, the best part?

Tiffany Asher 04:07

The best part is? [Laughter]

Rebecca Olson 04:11

The best part is.

Tiffany Asher 04:22

The best part. Just being able to spend one on one time with them, really, and hearing, like actually having conversations with them. You get to know people a lot better.

Rebecca Olson 04:27

Yeah.

Tiffany Asher 04:27

When you're one on one with them, instead of you know, dealing with the big group.

Rebecca Olson 04:28

How would you say the residents feel when they know that they have COVID-19? Do they seem scared or...

Tiffany Asher 04:35

Some of them seem scared. A lot of them, seem depressed because they're stuck in a room. Don't get to talk to people. I mean, a lot of them, their families don't even call them or anything because, you know, everything's in quarantine. You're not allowed to really touch anything, or do anything.

Rebecca Olson 04:52

Yeah, so they're just depressed and lonely?

Tiffany Asher 04:54

Stuck. Watch TV. I mean...

Rebecca Olson 04:57

That sounds sad.

Tiffany Asher 04:58

It is yeah. It really is.

Rebecca Olson 05:00

Okay, how worried are you about your own health?

Tiffany Asher 05:05

Truthfully, I mean, with it in the beginning, I was super scared about it. Like, seeing everything that was going on. But now since we know, kind of more about it, it doesn't really worry me, because, like I know how to, you know, take precautions of it. PPE. [Personal Protective Equipment] really, the mask, the goggles, you know, the gowns, gloves. Yeah.

Rebecca Olson 05:29

Do wear all of that? The gowns, the gloves, masks?

Tiffany Asher 05:32

Oh, yeah. 24/7 when I'm working on the COVID floor.

Rebecca Olson 05:35

Okay. Wow.

Tiffany Asher 05:36

And then when we leave the COVID floor, we have to switch them out. Like we have to put everything in, you know, bio hazard, and get brand new stuff. So, yeah.

Rebecca Olson 05:47

How long do you think it takes for you to like, get everything on.

Tiffany Asher 05:50

About 10 minutes.

Rebecca Olson 05:51

Is it like right off the elevator?

Tiffany Asher 05:54

They have a certain floor. So once you get off the elevator, there's the unit, the other unit I work on, and the COVID floor that I work on. So it's kind of like right down the hall.

Rebecca Olson 06:07

Okay.

Tiffany Asher 06:07

So kind of separated from the other unit, so they don't combine. It's all bagged up though to like, they have that, like quarantine bags hanging from the walls and stuff. And you have to go through like a little like area, and then the door opens. And then there's the COVID unit.

Rebecca Olson 06:25

Oh, okay. Are your doctors concerned at all about your health and where you're working?

Tiffany Asher 06:31

Yes, very much so. They will call me at least once to twice a week asking if I have symptoms, if I have this, if you know, how I feel. Are you like, are you okay? Just checking up on me. Making sure like, hey, if you feel anything, you need to call us right away.

Rebecca Olson 06:49

Right.

Tiffany Asher 06:50

Yeah.

Rebecca Olson 06:51

So what would they rather you be doing?

Tiffany Asher 06:53

Truthfully, they think people with CF should probably be like, you know, stay at home mom. Or work from home and stuff like that, because we're safer in a normal environment than going out and you know, working with people who have COVID.

Rebecca Olson 07:07

Right.

Tiffany Asher 07:19

Because like, even when it started, like they would call us, me and my other friend who CF they would call us and be like, hey, you need to order you know, your groceries from Walmart and have it delivered to your house don't go out in public.

Rebecca Olson 07:19

Right. So they would just rather you stay at home all the time?

Tiffany Asher 07:19

So... Oh, yeah. But like our excuses were, well, we always wore masks before this. So you know, it's not a big deal to us.

Rebecca Olson 07:29

Right.

Tiffany Asher 07:30

But it is to them.

Rebecca Olson 07:32

Right. And a lot of people can't just, I mean, I'm sure you're not the only person with CF that has a job.

Tiffany Asher 07:37

Oh, no.

Rebecca Olson 07:38

They just expect you guys to stop working and to stay home.

Tiffany Asher 07:41

Oh, yeah. Well, a lot of people with CF actually get disability because of, you know, the body pains and stuff, we can't really move much, our lungs decrease so fast of oxygen. So they're like, well, you should just work from home or they get disability. And it's like, Well, I don't have those options.

Rebecca Olson 07:44

Right.

Tiffany Asher 07:58

So.

Rebecca Olson 07:58

Have you ever considered getting on disability?

Tiffany Asher 08:01

I was on it. But with the situation of growing up with my mother, they took it away because my mom abused it.

Rebecca Olson 08:08

Oh.

Tiffany Asher 08:09

Yeah.

Rebecca Olson 08:09

Okay. Okay. Could you describe your personal life for us?

Tiffany Asher 08:18

Well, I'm a mother of two. [Laughs]

Rebecca Olson 08:20

Okay.

Tiffany Asher 08:21

And with my CF, it's kind of hard, because like, there's days I need to do my treatments, but my son needs my attention more than, you know, doing my treatments. And it's hard to do them,

while my son's throwing a fit or my daughter's upset or trying to do my daughter's schoolwork. So it's just, it's hard to deal with it. And then like it kind of gets in the way of me and my husband because like he gets upset that I don't do my treatments when I'm trying to take care of the kids.

Rebecca Olson 08:45

Right.

Tiffany Asher 08:46

And stuff. So it just...

Rebecca Olson 08:47

What is a treatment?

Tiffany Asher 08:51

It's a vest machine that goes on and shakes me and shakes the mucus out of my lungs with a nebulizer of three antibiotics going in.

Rebecca Olson 08:59

Okay.

Tiffany Asher 08:59

Yeah.

Rebecca Olson 08:59

So it helps you feel better?

Tiffany Asher 09:02

It more just clears my lungs out.

Rebecca Olson 09:04

Okay.

Tiffany Asher 09:04

So I don't get lung infections.

Rebecca Olson 09:06

Okay, so they're pretty important.

Tiffany Asher 09:08

Oh yeah.

Rebecca Olson 09:09

Okay. [Laughter]

Tiffany Asher 09:10

It's very hard though, with kids, like a lot of people with CF, they can't have kids.

Rebecca Olson 09:14

Mm hmm.

Tiffany Asher 09:14

So I got lucky, and I had two, with everything. But, yeah, it's, it's hard. A lot of people don't understand that like, with CF too because they can't help because they're like, Oh, no, you can just do it. Just you know, sit the kid down. No, that's not how it works.

Rebecca Olson 09:28

Yeah. Do you have family in the area?

Tiffany Asher 09:33

I, yeah, I do. I have my dad and stepmom, and I have my mom and my brothers and sister and stuff.

Rebecca Olson 09:42

Are you close with them?

Tiffany Asher 09:44

Not really. I've always been the black sheep of the family.

Rebecca Olson 09:46

Okay. Has working on the COVID floor affected your home life at all?

Tiffany Asher 09:54

No, not really.

Rebecca Olson 09:55

No?

Tiffany Asher 09:57

No. I mean, I know COVID is real and everything. But, Steve, my husband's like, "Ah, you know, I don't know, I haven't, I haven't met anybody with COVID yet." And I'm just like, "I work with them every day." [Laughter]

Rebecca Olson 10:10

Yeah. So you guys don't really, you're not scared?

Tiffany Asher 10:15

We don't discuss it really about the COVID because like politics and COVID stuff, we just kind of you know, I've learned it rips your family apart. Because it did rip my family apart, politics and like everything like that. So we just don't talk about stuff like that. We talk about like, actual daily stuff. Like, hey, like, this is what I did today. That's what he did today. Our kids' situation, stuff like that.

Rebecca Olson 10:35

Okay. Do you take any special precautions to ensure that you don't bring the virus home to your family?

Tiffany Asher 10:42

Yes, right when I get home, my kids - my daughter - my son's at daycare. My daughter's at daycare. Steve's at work, I'll come home, and I'll literally throw my uniform, my scrubs into the washing machine right away to then wash it.

Rebecca Olson 10:56

Yes.

Tiffany Asher 10:56

So...

Rebecca Olson 10:57

Okay. And does your family support your decision to work on a COVID floor?

Tiffany Asher 11:05

I mean, my husband hasn't said anything about it, so I mean, I guess like you're bringing money in so hey.

Rebecca Olson 11:12

What about like your extended family or your husband's family?

Tiffany Asher 11:16

They don't really say anything. They just kind of like hey, you need to do this. You got to do what you got to do. So I mean, it's money, and it is what it is. So, I mean, like COVID is everywhere now we can't really stop it. So...

Rebecca Olson 11:28

Right. It's not just at a long term care facility.

Tiffany Asher 11:31

Yeah, it's everywhere. It's at Walmart. It's at home. Like it's at people's other houses, if somebody brings it in, you know. So...

Rebecca Olson 11:39

Right. Alright. Well, thank you for your time.