

Transcript of Interview of Christopher Viveiros by Alex Bice

Interviewer: Alex Bice

Interviewee: Christopher Viveiros

Date: 07/30/2020

Location (Interviewee): Jamaica Plain, Boston, Massachusetts

Location (Interviewer): Boston, Massachusetts

Abstract: Northeastern University student Alex Bice interviewed the Director of Communications at Fenway Health Christopher Viveiros. In this interview, they discuss what Fenway Health does for its community and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their interactions with the community. Fenway Health has been able to create signage, update its website, send out emails, and resort to telehealth appointments to help the people in the community that doesn't to be seen in person. Viveiros is concerned that the voices of many minority communities are not being heard, but is glad that some health officials have been able to speak the truth.

Alex Bice 0:00

We are recording. My name is Alex Bice. I am here with Chris Viveiros. The date is July 30 2020. The time is 1:04pm. I am located in Boston, Massachusetts, Chris, would you mind telling me where you are located?

Christopher Viveiros 0:21

I am in Jamaica Plain, which I think is also Boston, Massachusetts.

Alex Bice 0:26

Great. I just want to briefly review the informed consent and DFDs document that you signed earlier. This interview is for the COVID-19 Oral History Project which is associated with the Journal of the Plague Year a COVID-19 archive. The COVID-19 Oral History Project is a rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID 19 epidemic. We have designed this project so that professional researchers and the broader public can create and upload their oral histories to our open access and open source database. This study will help us collect narratives and understandings about COVID-19 as well as help us better understand the impacts of the pandemic over time, the recording demographic information and the verbatim transcripts will be deposited in the Journal of the Plague Year a COVID-19 archive, and the Indiana University Library System for the use of researchers and the general public. Do you have any questions about the project that I can answer?

Christopher Viveiros 1:23

No, I read the paperwork you sent and that all sounds consistent,

Alex Bice 1:27

right? Taking part in the study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part or you may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled, your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Indiana University. IUPUI or the IUPUI

Arts and Humanities Institute. Participating in this project means that your interview will be recorded in digital video and or audio format and may be transcribed. There are recordings and possible transcriptions of my interviews, copies of any supplementary documents or additional photos that you wish to share. And the informed consent and deed of gift may be deposited in the Journal of Plague Year: a COVID-19 archive and the universe. In the end, the Indiana University Library System and your name and other means of identification will not be confidential. Do you have any questions?

Christopher Viveiros 2:25
Nope.

Alex Bice 2:27
Right. In addition to your signed document, would you please offer a verbal confirmation that you understand and agree to these terms. You just did. I am also asking that you verbally confirm that you have agreed that your interview will be made available under the Creative Commons Attribution license.

Christopher Viveiros 2:45
I agree that my verbal interview will be made available under the Creative Commons Attribution.

Alex Bice 2:52
Awesome. Thank you so much. All right. So to get started, I was wondering if you could please talk a little bit about your background as well as where you work currently, and in what position.

Christopher Viveiros 3:06
So I'm the Director of Communications at Fenway Health. Fenway Health is a community health center in Boston, Massachusetts. We are a magnet Community Health Center though, so we're not just we don't just serve the people in our neighborhoods, we have people who come to us from a number of other geographical areas, because we serve the LGBTQIA plus community, people living with HIV. So we draw from a broad geographic domain. We also are a little bit different than some other community health centers, in that we have a larger research study component. We also have a nationally funded education and advocacy programs. So I think that sort of defines us as a little bit different from some of the other community health centers that we might consider our partners.

Alex Bice 4:06
Right. And sort of related to that, what did an average day or an average week look like in your position before sort of the start of the pandemic?

Christopher Viveiros 4:20
Well, then there's a lot going on at Fenway. And the communications department is lucky enough to be involved in many of the different things that we do. I think that one of the things that sort of changed as COVID became a growing concern is that we not only had to try to maintain, change, and sustain all of those other things, but COVID itself became a huge concern. And there was a lot of work that had to be done to try to deal with that

Alex Bice 4:59

What was uh some of the work that Fenway health has been doing sort of in that COVID sphere?

Christopher Viveiros 5:09

So, you know, like many community health centers, we have been doing a lot of work to triage patients who have COVID. But we've also been working to make sure that other patients who may or may not have COVID, because we don't know necessarily, everyone who has the COVID virus, have access to health care, that is culturally affirming, and that helps keep them safe. You know, we did a huge pivot to telehealth, because that was one of the ways we're able to take care of so many of our patients. But there are still some patients who do have to come for in service. Now, medical appointments, and we've been trying to figure out the best way to see them, we have been able to move almost all of our behavioral health appointments to telehealth a couple of areas where we've seen some challenges are around our dental and optometry programs. It's not necessarily optimal to see dental patients or optometry patients remotely. It can be for some conditions, but it's not for everything. And those are also, especially for dental, dental is a very, the people that you're seeing have to have their mouths open, they have to be breathing on you. So we've been trying to figure out how we can do that safely. As a lot of organizations have, we're not the only one dealing with this, but trying to figure out how to deal with dental care. And this COVID age has been very challenging.

Alex Bice 7:00

Right, and in terms of the communities that Fenway Health is working with, and that you interact with sort of as part of, obviously the organization, do you think that the pandemic has put more strain or pressure on those communities, in terms of health outcomes and other sorts of, I guess, lived experiences.

Christopher Viveiros 7:29

So we don't have the researcher data right now to show. If that's the case, we did publish a paper at the beginning of the epidemic, talking about the reasons why it might so you know, that was only three or four months ago, it's not very long ago. So we have to look at why we thought that might be true, and then figure out if it actually was true. And that's something that we'll definitely be looking at. And it's hard to tell. But there were a lot of reasons why we thought that it might I mean, the folks that we work with, in general, don't access health care as much as their peers. So that's already a problem when you're dealing with people who might not think that the symptoms that they have are something worth dealing with. We also have co-morbidity issues with people who maybe have diabetes, or obesity or smoking. There's a lot of data that shows that in the LGBTQIA plus community, smoking is a huge issue. And there's a lot of thought around the idea that that might also be a big problem for people who have COVID because it's a respiratory infection. So looking at all of that stuff, and trying to figure out how it might be impacting people is something we're actively doing. It's not something that we necessarily have the answers to right now, though, it's going to take a little bit of time to be able to figure that out.

Alex Bice 9:12

Awesome, thanks. Thank you for that information. And then I guess to ask some questions more focused on your personal experience, what have what is it been like for you over the pandemic, so over the past sort of five months.

Christopher Viveiros 9:35

So we activated an Incident Command at Fenway early on in the epidemic. And what that means is that we had a group of people that we're meeting every morning from 7:30 to 9am. Over phone as time went on, to talk about what's going on and what we can do to effectively respond to it. And that kept going for a while. Thankfully, over time, it became something that wasn't as necessary every day. So we're able to sort of scale that back. But it was a very intense sort of experience. Looking at this idea that we had to retool our entire organization, we had to rethink everything we were doing. And we had to communicate about that to folks, which was the most important thing to my department. That meant a lot of like, updating the website, sending out emails, creating flyers, creating posters, creating signage like floor signage, it's not something we had done a lot of before. It just became a very, very intense sort of experience, where we had to think about how our organization was communicating to the people that look to us for care, to help make sure that they could get that care, but also stay as safe as possible while they were doing it.

Alex Bice 11:05

Has there been any tenants or sort of core pieces that you and Fenway Health I've been trying to communicate around Coronavirus to the communities you're working with?

Christopher Viveiros 11:21

I think one of the biggest things that is not unique to Fenway, it's probably something every organization has been trying to communicate is that we're all doing whatever we can to make your experience as safe as possible. And whether that means that you get a telehealth appointment, whether that means that you do have to come in for an appointment, but that we have certain precautions in place. However, that is happening. It's just making sure that people know that we're doing it as safely as possible. We've had to make a lot of changes every healthcare organization has. But I think that making sure that people know about that is so important. Because nobody is probably assuming that things are different. I mean, people know that they're different than the one way. But I think that people probably aren't assuming that the precautions are in place. And we need to make sure that they do know that. Because without folks knowing that it's safe to get care, they're not going to get care. And there are so many things going on that are not COVID-related. You know, people have heart attacks, people have HIV, people have a lot of things going on, that are not COVID-related and we need to make sure we're still dealing with those the same time as we're dealing with this pandemic.

Alex Bice 12:51

Understood, definitely. Could you tell me a little bit more sort of

what's has your role or focus then over the past few months in terms of the activities that I guess, send my health more broadly, what have been things that you focus on sort of day to day?

Christopher Viveiros 13:20

So the COVID stuff is huge. Obviously, it's taking up a lot of bandwidth. It's something that has informed a lot of the different things we're doing as a communications department. Like I said, we've had to do signage, we've had to do different emails, we've had to update information on our websites that do all sorts of things. But then there's also a lot of other stuff going on. The LGBTQA plus community has been impacted by the way that the federal administration has been behaving, it's impacted by things that happen in the world all the time. So it's important not to lose focus on those other things, while also making sure that we center what's happening with what's going on with COVID. So, Fenway, for example, joined a federal lawsuit against HHS and the administration to challenge the fact that they were going to roll back protections from the Affordable Care Act around gender identity and gender expression, which covers a lot of things, as well as age discrimination. And, you know, we've had to sort of do these things that we'd be doing normally, while also focusing a lot of our time and attention on the broader pandemic and what's happening there. So, it's been a challenge. The people that work for me are wonderful. They've had a lot of stress, having to deal with what they do on a day to day basis while also trying to make sure that they're addressing the pandemic and what we need to do. As far as that goes.

Alex Bice 15:12

How have you been seeking to sort of balance and how you're communicating with people both the urgency of obviously the Coronavirus, but also all of these all of these different pieces that sort of were always important and are still there, even if Coronavirus has taken up so much more of the news time.

Christopher Viveiros 15:38

It's tough, you know, because not only is Coronavirus, taking up a lot of our time, it's taking up the time of the people who are reporting the news. So we can't necessarily rely on the idea that just because we put something out the folks who normally cover our issues and the things that are important to us, that they're going to be able to do that. Because their editors and their publishers, and their owners are focused on what's happening with Coronavirus, and that's what gets clicks or gets views or whatever the metric is that you're using to look at how this stuff works. So it's not just our capacity, is the capacity of the folks that we're trying to reach out to. And that's very tough, you know, we're all like sort of stretched to the limit a little bit. And it can be it can be very difficult, can be very tough.

Alex Bice 16:46

In terms of or to what extent do you feel like? Sorry, I'm trying to think about what the best way to phrase this is there? Do you think that there are specific challenges that you or your organization have faced with all of this going on that are separate or sort of, in some ways different from the broader challenges facing public health in this moment.

Christopher Viveiros 17:32

I mean, I think one of the things that can be challenging for organizations that deal with discrete populations, so like Fenway is obviously very focused on the LGBTQIA Plus community, other organizations deal with the African American or black American community, the Latinx community, like all of us, folks who are focused on those places, have already been competing for attention, because we have to compete in an environment where the broader attention is on

what, uh, appeals to the mass audience, which is not always the individual populations that we all are trying to serve and deal with. But then also deal with the idea that there's this incredible juggernaut of a thing happening right now. It's affecting, like, everyone, it's not, it's not just the thing that's affecting a couple of different populations. It's all of us, we're all dealing with it. So trying to figure out the best way to message around the idea that we of course, need to acknowledge that that is happening. But there are still these other issues going on and these other populations that have problems. These other populations that have things that need to be discussed. And it's it's not always easy. It's it's very tough actually sometimes.

Alex Bice 19:08

What do you think is the role of a what do you think is the role of public health in this particular moment? Or how can public health organizations best use their their bandwidth and their role in some unity? Especially as like you've said Coronavirus, has been this large Juggernaut, but at the same time, there are all these other things still at play that I think you've sort of seen jumped out throughout the past few months with the news cycle.

Christopher Viveiros 19:46

Yeah, I mean, I think that public health organizations have tried to elevate the different strategies that could be used to address this pandemic and a wholesale way. I don't think that we've always been served well, by some of the folks in our political leadership, who have not really helped bring that to the fore. I think that public health could play an incredibly important role. I think that there are a lot of voices. Like Anthony Fauci is one person who I will name but he's certainly not the only one. There are other folks out there talking the truth. There is a way for public health to really help with what is going on right now. And I think it's being hampered by certain people who have other agendas. That said, in terms of more discreet public health issues, it's just our roles to continue to make sure that we do everything we can to elevate the voices of the people that we serve, and the people who need us to advocate for them, to be sure that we're not just getting the issues out there. But that the work we're doing to get the issues out there is resulting in us getting what is needed to help people whether that means additional funding, whether that means additional focus in individual health organizations, whatever, whatever the needs, are, we need to make sure that those are the things we're advocating for.

Alex Bice 21:33

And the leading to something you said there, how do you think, Fenway Health is elevating some of those voices within the communities that you work with that are facing that are facing this crisis?

Christopher Viveiros 21:51

Well, we've been doing a number of things that I think we're pretty proud of. One is the lawsuits and I talked a little bit about where we're suing the administration. We also early on, put out a lot of information about how people who were involved in some of the protests that were going on because of the Black Lives Matter. And racial injustice issues, could make sure that they accessed testing and health care. And then also looking at how we can listen to other communities and other populations that need us to hear them and figure out the best way to elevate their voices, but also how to meet the needs that they have.

Alex Bice 22:45

Right. I'm wondering sort of as we start to wrap up here, as we're hitting the half hour, I was wondering, are there any questions that you wished I had asked in relation to this oral history that weren't brought up?

Christopher Viveiros 23:03

No, I think you asked a lot of really great questions. I know one of the things you said when you emailed originally, was that you're wondering if there were other folks that you should talk to. And I just wanted to make sure if it's possible. At some point, after we're done chatting, if you can send a reminder email to me, so that I can make sure I think of some folks at Fenway and maybe other organizations who would be good for you to talk with. I think that would be great.

Alex Bice 23:30

Much appreciated. Thank you. And do you have anything else you would like to say or add before we end this interview?

Christopher Viveiros 23:39

No, I just think

this is a really great thing. I'm excited to see where this goes and eventually be able to listen to what other folks have to say because I talked too much and that's me. So

Alex Bice 23:51

Well, again, much appreciated for you participating in this. Thank you.

Christopher Viveiros 23:56

Oh, thank you.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>