

Interviewee: Janice Hughes

Interviewer: Zach Hughes

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Abstract: Janice Hughes, currently living in Madison, WI, is a medical abstractor for UW Health. Within the interview she talks about how the workplace has changed, along with day to day life during the COVID pandemic. She talks about her experiences with COVID and how her community around her has been dealing with it. She talks about how mental health has been affected with the pandemic along with physical health. Janice Hughes discusses what it was like to receive the vaccine and some of the lessons she has learned overall with the pandemic.

Zach Hughes 0:05

All right. Are we already? Yeah.

Zach Hughes 0:07

All right. So the date is April 22 2021. And it is 7pm. At this moment, there are 31,666,546 cases of COVID in the United States, with 566,494 deaths. In Wisconsin, we have 592,494 cases with 6725 deaths. California to compare to Wisconsin has 3,622,427 case it's, well, it has 59,992 deaths. And the percentage of the population that is fully vaccinated in the United States is 26.4%. All right, so I'm Zach Hughes, do you want to introduce yourself?

Janice Hughes 1:03

I'm Janice Hughes, Zach's mother.

Zach Hughes 1:06

All right, and what do you primarily do on a day to day basis?

Janice Hughes 1:13

well, my job is quite complex. Um, I do a lot of data entry. With my job, I am a lab abstractor as well as that's about it, I guess. I have I abstract labs and lots of medical records. I'm an epic user. So I work with the medical chart. Epic medical charts and records. And where do you work? What I work for UW Health? In Madison.

Zach Hughes 1:59

Where do you live?

Janice Hughes 2:01

Where do I live? Yep. Um, I live in the Madison area in Deforest.

Zach Hughes 2:09

So I guess the first question I have for you is how has COVID-19 affected your job?

Janice Hughes 2:16

Um, well, um, many ways. Where I used to work in an office building with many people, I would say, about 100, at least. I now work at home, just myself. And it's very different. And, you know, I don't have the interaction with coworkers. It's very quiet. And so yeah, my work environment is completely different. We do our meetings via zoom, type call. And so we really need do not see each other in person. Everything is over the web. And so in that way, it's, it's my work is pretty much the same. But I'm not having that interaction with other people. And that's been very different. But it's been working out fine.

Zach Hughes 3:30

So do you think that there's not? You don't have as much of a sense of community at work as it used to be where you guys were all in the same building?

Janice Hughes 3:39

Yeah, yeah, it's very different that way, there are times that I feel very disconnected. And, yeah, that that makes it a little bit more difficult. But on a positive note, we are finding that throughout the the entire organization, people that do work at home, it's working. It's actually working very well and that we are more productive, more efficient with our work, and we're going to stay home permanently. And so, yeah.

Zach Hughes 4:20

are your feelings about that? Or is it? Are you excited to be home? Or is it kind of a mixed bag of feelings?

Janice Hughes 4:27

Yeah, I have mixed feelings. At the beginning, I was very excited, because I didn't well, I didn't know that I would be home permanently. We thought, you know, COVID we didn't know what was going to happen with COVID. And we thought maybe a couple of weeks and we'd be back in the office. And little did I know. A few weeks ago, I'd be picking up all my personal belongings to be at home permanently. So I'm kind of sad about that really miss seeing my co workers. There's something to be said about just having that socialization and that kind of thing. But I'm used to working at home now. And yeah, I like it fine. So I mean, there are definitely pros and cons. But I've been, I don't have to drive where it was a 45 minute drive, so

I'm saving a lot on gas. And I feel pretty good about that. And so yeah, it's it's a mixed bag. But now that I am now that I have been home for a while I am getting used to it. And you know, it's fine. I'm good with it.

Zach Hughes 5:56

So like moving on. I know your job hasn't been cut, but his Do you know, anyone that works with you that may have lost their job because of COVID-19? Or have they pretty much gotten everyone moved in situated online?

Janice Hughes 6:14

Yeah, I do not know anyone. Personally, I do know that within the organization, there have been people that their work because of COVID. They had to go to other work in other areas, whether it be the hospital, the clinic setting, one of the business offices in various capacity. And that's what's nice about our organization is that there's always need for work somewhere. But healthcare is pretty busy. So yeah, fortunately, I was not. I've been fine with my job and didn't have to.

Zach Hughes 7:10

So I'm gathering these overall COVID is not really affected. It has affected the workplace, but it has not affected the actual economy of the job in the field you're in, right, most people are still in the organization or still maintain their job online. Right. And there was a point where,

Janice Hughes 7:34

because a lot of my work depends, they look at the stats, production, it did get pretty low, we weren't doing surgeries. Because of all the COVID patients are coming in. So a lot of surgeries had to be either cancelled, or had to be booked for a different day or rescheduled. So that was a huge part of our job is entering data on patients who had surgeries, whether we owe outpatient or inpatient. So our our work did decline quite a bit for a while, but we still had enough work to keep us going through even that, you know, both time. So

Zach Hughes 8:35

do you think that maybe the because of COVID, that you know more about technology than you did before COVID? Because everything is moved so online.

Janice Hughes 8:46

Yeah, I had to learn some different programs. Yeah, absolutely. Just doing these zoom kinds of meetings, never did those before cuz we met in a conference room for a monthly meeting. So yeah, technology, definitely. I've had to learn. And it's Yeah.

Zach Hughes 9:11

So moving on to outside of work things. How has COVID affected your day to day lifestyle, just like besides work, just your normal activities?

Janice Hughes 9:26

a lot less than pre COVID in that I am fully vaccinated But before that, I didn't go anywhere. And so I felt very isolated, afraid to go to the store afraid to go out anywhere in public. You know, even with a mask that for quite a while. You know it was staying at home and going to the store

Only for the things that I needed that I, you know, the basic things that I needed. No more eating out in restaurants doing all the cooking and that kind of thing.

Zach Hughes 10:15

Do you think that as time went on since COVID started, you started to, like, go outside a little more, even when there was no vaccine just because maybe you just felt so trapped inside or

Janice Hughes 10:29

Absolutely, yeah, yeah. As you know, Zach I love to run. And that was kind of my escape and it still is just to get out and get fresh air, whether it be walking by running, but definitely, definitely. And now with the weather being very nice. It's been great to get out more.

Zach Hughes 10:55

How have you done things with friends nearly as often anymore? How do you? How do you go about your social life during the pandemic?

Janice Hughes 11:06

Yeah, no, not really. There really isn't a social life. And yeah, no, I really haven't seen some of my friends in a long time since COVID. And we communicate on the phone, or we FaceTime. We text. So yeah, that it was difficult.

Zach Hughes 11:34

Because Yeah, the face to face interaction just is more meaningful. Is it more meaningful?

Janice Hughes 11:40

Yeah, definitely. Definitely. And now that I'm vaccinated, you know, and Grandma,

Zach Hughes 11:49

yeah, you can go see give each other

Janice Hughes 11:51

a hug. And that's awesome.

Zach Hughes 11:55

Um, moving on. So like, I guess you've kind of considered a lot of those challenges. Would you consider those some of your biggest challenges during COVID? Or do you have more challenges that weren't covered? Just throw your daily lifestyle?

Janice Hughes 12:13

I think that I think that was about it. Really? You know, with my job I again, yeah. Probably. I think I covered everything.

Zach Hughes 12:31

recreationally. Do you find yourself maybe watching more TV or reading more things that revolve around being inside the house?

Janice Hughes 12:41

Yeah, definitely more Netflix binges.

Zach Hughes 12:46

Do you feel as motivated to exercise?

Janice Hughes 12:51

I'm not initially with when COVID when all that started. But I think it kind of made me more motivated to get out. You know, and as you know, Zach, I, you know, I'm in training, but I kind of had to force myself to get that, you know? Yeah, motivation was definitely an issue. But, um, kind of had to push that a little bit. And obviously, now, with the weather nicer, it's easier to get out.

Zach Hughes 13:25

And not just exercise, but just in general. Do you find it more difficult to like, just go through the daily routine every day and get ready and go to work? Dude, is that harder to get through then, when we weren't in a pandemic? Or does it feel the same?

Janice Hughes 13:48

Um, it's boring. Quite honestly. It gets really boring and really old. Yeah. And yeah, I get ready and go downstairs and start working. So. Yeah. And again, it would, it's getting better now. Definitely better now with things opening up. But the beginning Yeah, that was it. You know, he's excited to work at home. But then as days and weeks went on, just kind of got to be the same kind of routine

Zach Hughes 14:28

within the like the community or deforest, Have you? Do you think that other people are taking measures not nearly as seriously as you are? Or do you feel like when you talk to people, most of you guys are on the same boat in the fact that you try to keep your distance in public and you're cognizant of the fact that, you know, there are people around you that are less healthy. Then you are in could, you know, be a lot more, it can be a lot more damaging to their health.

Janice Hughes 15:06

Yeah well, first of all, I don't know about other people in the community, really, but what I can see. Yeah, right here in Deforest people are wearing their masks. And yeah, you have to be careful, the elderly, and who you're next to you, you know, it's like you constantly have to. And sometimes it's hard, you know, when, especially in the beginning, oh, I have to keep my distance. Oh, I have to remember to put my mask on as I'm entering the store. And now, I feel it's easier because we're just so used to it. Um, but I'm sorry, it was the latter part of your question.

Zach Hughes 15:50

I'm just a of the fact that everyone or you guys kind of just on the same same way, wavelength of the fact that you, you are taking it seriously. And you feel like the people around you are taking it seriously?

Janice Hughes 16:06

Yeah, for the most part. I think so. And again, you know, I still don't get out very much. So it's hard to know that. Yeah. Now if I'm out of Madison, or the G forest area, that tells us a little bit more, but for the most part, I think the whole area, including Madison, I think we're all for the most part. I know that I am careful of the other person.

Zach Hughes 16:35

So like, I guess, is it has your relationship changed with like people that you know, that are unhealthy like, or that are more, more susceptible to, you know, being more harmed by the pandemic? Like, like Grandma, have you? Has that changed the relationship at all? Or are you guys still frequently communicating even when you can't maybe go see her in person.

Janice Hughes 17:03

And again, that has changed now, because we're all vaccinated. But before that was very difficult. It was very hard for me emotionally, I had a tough time with going to her house and not being able to hug her. But yet knowing that for her own good and to keep her healthy. I needed to wear my mask and keep my distance. And I did not as you know, I did not visit her often at all, when the numbers were really spiked with COVID. And we talk, and we still do almost every day on the phone. So there's that but emotionally difficult for me, but especially for grandma. And

Zach Hughes 17:52

it's hard because she lives on a farm and she's not. You know, she's distanced from her own community. Already as it is.

Janice Hughes 18:00

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think her church, you know, she bought a church, and that was really hard for her because that, you know, it's a very meaningful part of her life. And so I think

Unknown Speaker 18:19

COVID I

Janice Hughes 18:20

think the elderly in general has really affected them.

Zach Hughes 18:28

So moving on, um, I know you haven't gotten COVID. But do you know, a decent amount of people, or at least a few people who've gotten COVID?

Janice Hughes 18:39

Yes, a few.

Zach Hughes 18:41

And you found out about it? Was it like, scary to you? Or was it? Like, what were your feelings when you found out that someone you knew got COVID?

Janice Hughes 18:54

Well, again, you know, I go back to the beginning of COVID, when it was the cases were really high. Very scary. All the way around for myself and so many people. But the one lady that I knew, yeah, it was scary. But fortunately, she had really a very mild, very minimal case, she was fine. I have a friend now, who is on day 12 with COVID. And she's still not well, she's very weak. She has labored breathing, and I worry a lot about her.

Zach Hughes 19:38

Do you think that like when the pandemic initially started, it was like, more shocking to see people get sick from Oh, yeah. And oh, yeah. scarier. Were do think that And do you think that that has like tapered off over time as we're just gotten used to the fact that so many people in the United States Have COVID do you think less scarier, or less scary or scarier? because more people have gotten COVID?

Janice Hughes 20:08

Well, you know, I think it, to me, it feels less scary than in the beginning, or when the numbers were so high, so many people dying. So being that I work in the healthcare industry, we had so many hospitalizations at our hospitals, and just through the kind of work that I do, I would come across so many of these patients COVID, positive COVID, positive one after another, and it was really scary and all ages. And I think now that things have settled down somewhat, and it's just kind of a norm somebody comes in and as a COVID test, and, you know, they might be positive, you know, are negative, and it just doesn't feel scary to me now. Because, again, I think we're just so used to it, we are so used to COVID. And yeah, and every case is different. Every case if

Zach Hughes 21:18

so, I think maybe the the random consequences of it, some people get it real, you know, Healthy People are getting really sick from it healthy people are experiencing a minor headache, the fact that it's so, you know, you don't know what we're going to get with it. I do the fact that it's scary, because, right. We don't know what we're gonna happen

Janice Hughes 21:42

sometimes. And I feel less scared, because my family's almost fully vaccinated.

Zach Hughes 21:52

So the vaccination

Janice Hughes 21:55

feels so much better. Yeah. Only one person in our family. Yeah. Allison, has the second? And so, so that makes me just feel a lot more at ease. But yeah, it's, it's still out there. There's still a lot of COVID

Zach Hughes 22:15

in with the restrictions, you know, a lot of them still haven't been lifted, even with the amount of vaccinations because, you know, people are still still not getting vaccinated and, etc. Um, do you think that this is this overall pandemic has been more of a mental health battle or more of a physical health battle? In the fact that, you know, I feel does everyone? I mean, it differs, but what do you think? Do you think that it's more, the virus has done more damage to people's mental health or physical well being? Or do you think that both have a large significance?

Janice Hughes 22:57

I think both but mental health a little bit more much. And so many, so many aspects. You know, you college kids, you know, yeah, I mean, on so many levels, I'll start with grade school, elementary, middle High School, you know, having to all of a sudden work, or do their schooling at home, parents having to figure out what they're going to do about their jobs, many of them having to leave their jobs to stay at home, to teach their kids or to be there to help them. And, you know, you college students having all of a sudden, you know, having to do your schooling online and in a little dorm or a house. And me, you know, having to work remotely. I just think on so many levels, the mental well being has suffered greatly.

Zach Hughes 24:09

So moving on to the vaccine. So you've said that you've been vaccinated? Um, were you nervous to get vaccinated? Or, you know, were you afraid of the side effects? Or?

Janice Hughes 24:24

Um, initially, I I guess I was a little nervous because I got mine early on, you know, in February, and I just, I guess, I was afraid of side effects. I, I was just a little nervous about that. Um, other than that, I was fine. You know, the second when I got my second vaccine, not nervous at all. And I felt it was the right thing. You know, now I feel I feel good about it.

Zach Hughes 25:01

Did you get any side effects at all?

Janice Hughes 25:04

Um, I did not. Although got a sore arm. In the second vaccine, I had a very, very sore arm. I worked the next day. And I, I had a hard time dressing lifting my arms dressed myself. And I was very fatigued, very fatigued. And I was wondering where I couldn't do my job. I was so tired.

Zach Hughes 25:28

Which vaccine did you get?

Janice Hughes 25:31

Um, let's see, there's the Moderna. And what is the other one? I got? The Pfizer?

Zach Hughes 25:37

Yeah, that one.

Janice Hughes 25:39

Yeah, and that was, I believe, 21 days. In between?

Zach Hughes 25:47

vaccinations. Did you have like, was it difficult? Um, I mean, you work in the medical field. So it probably wasn't that difficult getting access to the vaccination. But did you have any issues trying to get the vaccination schedule

Unknown Speaker 26:02

no

Zach Hughes 26:05

Okay.

So moving on to a different topic. So, what have you been using for your news source during the pandemic? Have you been watching the news a lot during the pandemic?

Janice Hughes 26:23

Probably a little bit too much.

Zach Hughes 26:26

Which, what source? Do you watch? Mainly?

Janice Hughes 26:30

I watched CNN.

Zach Hughes 26:32

Do you think that? Um, do you think that these new sources, like CNN, these mainstream ones, do you think that they're reliable, or,

Janice Hughes 26:46

um, I find cnn to be the most reliable. However, I you know, there can be media overload. And too much I just stick I believe in what I believe. I I think there is, you know, whether it be Fox, CNN or whatever, news channel, it's, there's so much coverage, and it probably is overdone a little bit. But I mean, my feeling, you know, you take what you want from it, what information you want, and no, COVID is real. It's a pandemic, just like there were things, you know, years ago, like with your grandma's smallpox, polio, that they had to get vaccinated for. So I kind of think it's just one of those things that, you know, there is a vaccine, and we need to be vaccinated. So we stay healthy, like any other vaccine, and I also believe that this vaccine was in the making for

years. And they just kind of had a I mean, I don't believe Yes, there was a rush on it. But yet, I mean, you have to go through so many trials, and they're not going to put a vaccine out there that isn't safe. And of course, like any other vaccines, there's going to be an occasion, which is rare that someone's going to have an issue someone is definitely sick.

Zach Hughes 28:42

Do you think that the news like such as CNN, do you think they've overdramatized the pandemic or do you think that they're fairly accurate in the fact that of house the severity of the pandemic is,

Janice Hughes 28:58

I think they're pretty accurate. Okay. I think they're pretty accurate. That's what I believe. They're, you know, I like well, CNN Cuomo, and he had the COVID virus. And it was very interesting following him because he worked while he had the virus, and he was sick for a long time. And I believed everything he went through, you know, you take what you want from these programs again. You know, you believe in what you believe in, but yeah, of course, there's over. You know, they dramatize it. I think that happens on any channel. Um, but, you know, the bottom line is, it's real, and we need to be vaccinated.

Zach Hughes 29:51

Um, do you think that, you know, since you know, you're from Madison area, you're so close to the Capitol. Do you think that evers has done a good job at handling the pandemic with what he's been given? Or do you think that? Maybe he didn't do enough?

Unknown Speaker 30:08

No, I think he's done a wonderful job. Here's the guy, like anybody. You know, you know, he, none of us knew that COVID was going to be here. He knew nothing about it. So you know it happened and, you know, he's our governor. I mean, he didn't know. And so he, I think he's done a very, very good job with something he's never had to deal with. He never dealt with anything like this. So, overall, I think he's done pretty well.

Zach Hughes 30:47

Do you think that, um, the pandemic as a whole should be a political issue, as in the fact that depending on which party you lean towards, it should be handled differently? Or do you think that people are making it too political? I really should just be a health issue.

Janice Hughes 31:06

I think it should be a health issue. I think it's way too political. Yeah, way too political. I mean, this is not we're talking about health, we're talking about people's lives. You know, people are dying from this. And I just don't see how politics should really even play a role in it. I mean, yeah.

Zach Hughes 31:31

So I guess, kind of wrapping up a little going forward, how is the pandemic changed you, then maybe the way you think about different things such as the community or your family or your friends,

Janice Hughes 31:51

for I think it's changed me, and that I try not to, I don't take things for granted that much anymore. And I think I've kind of gotten down to more of The Basics.

Like, I'm hopeful that a lot of people have, and that we need to just slow down a little bit in life.

And this is a very COVID is a very, I mean, very real, so many lives were lost. And I'm very, I'm just very grateful that I didn't get it or anybody in my family. And I, I'm just very grateful to be alive for all of us and be healthy.

Zach Hughes 32:42

Yeah. as a whole. Do you think that? Knowing what we know now, do we think that like, in terms of the government, do you think they are going to look back on this? And do you think that they're going to, you know, take a lot of lessons out of this? Do you think that they handled it well? What do they need to keep in mind for the future? in case something like this happens? Well, when something like this happens again,

Janice Hughes 33:14

I don't think anybody really knew that COVID was going to happen. So I think it's just been so new for everybody. And, you know, I probably they've learned some lessons. And, you know, I just think moving forward, we just have to know that. Well, first of all, get through this pandemic. And you know, hopefully, it never happens again, but be prepared. I don't know exactly. You know, what that would look like. But, yeah, I mean, I feel, you know, through all this, that govern meant, me needs to have some kind of plan. Yeah, I'm much. It's a hard it's kind of, yeah, I mean, yeah, I could really get into politics, but but it's hard to know. But hopefully, you know, in the few future and coming years, that, you know, we can get back to some, somewhat of some normalcy. And yeah,

Zach Hughes 34:35

yeah, I mean, I guess the last question I have for you following that is, do you How long do you think it's going to take to return to normalcy? Do you think it will ever return to normalcy, you know, at your workplace, obviously, is changed, or, you know, very long time, if not indefinitely, the future. You know, do you think he's I think it'll ever be the same as it was before. COVID. Or,

Janice Hughes 35:04

you know, again, I mean, it's just, I think about working at home now until I read your paper. And it's so different. It's so different. Um, I don't know if everything will return back to normal like it was, but I I'm hopeful that things will be better that you know, I think we'll still be wearing masks for a long time. I don't know, when this pandemic, nobody knows when for sure it'll be over with. And it's hard to know, it's hard to know, for sure what the future is going to look like. But I do

think it's going to, it's going to look a little different. I think we are going to be more cautious about you know, washing our hands and just those little things. Keeping our distance from people I you know, I kind of thing, we're so used to it now that I kind of think maybe that'll be the norm. And we won't be so quick to go to restaurants with the face or you know, those kinds of things. I don't think those levers exist. It'll be different, I think, I don't know.

Zach Hughes 36:37

But it definitely will snow for sure.

Janice Hughes 36:40

And that's just it. We don't none of us know for sure. I'm just gonna take it a day at a time and hope for the past.

Unknown Speaker 36:49

Alright, well,

Zach Hughes 36:50

I think that about sums it up.

Janice Hughes 36:53

Thank you.

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