

Interviewee: Cassie Nyhus **Interviewer:** Seth Maina

Date: November 11th, 2020

Format: Video recording, Zoom

Location of interview: Bloomer, Wisconsin

Transcriber: Seth Maina

Additional Transcription Equipment used: Otter.ai

Project in association with: University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Abstract: Cassie Nyhus was born and raised in Hayward, Wisconsin. She now lives in Bloomer, Wisconsin and works in Rice Lake, Wisconsin in the Radiology department. In this interview Cassie dives deep into what it's like to work in the healthcare field during a pandemic and her experiences firsthand with the people she has seen and the way these events have changed her workplace. She also touches on her thoughts on people's rights during this pandemic, and talks heavily about her own personal situation of the stresses that come with being pregnant and soon to be a mother during a global pandemic.

SM: My name is Seth Maina and I'm conducting an oral history interview as a part of an effort to archive the effects of the covid 19 pandemic on individuals and communities in the Midwest for both the Chippewa Valley COVID-19 archive and the Journal of the plague year COVID-19 archive. Today's date is Wednesday, November 11. And it is 10:42am. As of now there are 51.6 million confirmed cases and 1.27 million deaths from COVID worldwide. Of those 10.3 million confirmed cases and 240,000 deaths of COVID are in the United States. Today, we will be speaking to Cassie Nyhus in Bloomer Wisconsin. In Wisconsin, there are currently 294,000 confirmed cases of covid 19 and 2497 deaths. Cassie, thanks for taking the time to speak with us today. And for sharing your experiences of the pandemic. We appreciate your help and the perspectives of this for this important project. What is your full name? And do you mind sharing demographic information for the study such as race, ethnicity, age and gender?

CN: My name is Cassie Nyhus. I am Caucasian. I am a female. And I live in Bloomer Wisconsin, My hometown is Hayward, Wisconsin, and I work at the hospital, Marshfield Clinic in Rice Lake, Wisconsin.

SM: Okay, thank you very much for that information. So my first question for you is, has COVID-19 affected your job? And in what ways?

CN: Yes, it has definitely affected my job, I work in the imaging department. So I do all the X rays and CTS, on all of the COVID positive patients or the ones that are getting tested for COVID. So it definitely is affected our job, definitely a lot more stressful, you know, we have to gown up for everything face masks, face shield, put on the full gown, which is for our protection and the patient. So it's definitely worth it. But the stress level has definitely went up, our numbers have went up. Other than right away back in March, when it first started, they kind of got rid of all the elective stuff. So our numbers were a little bit lower, we weren't seeing as many COVID positive patients anyways. But over the last like three weeks, it has increased tremendously. And like I said, we're doing imaging on every single one of them. So anyone that walks through the door for possible covid or is already positive. me as a worker, I'm in that room dealing with them. And yeah, in our in our Sorry, my other co workers are you know, if they get affected or they get exposed outside of work, then they have to quarantine for those times, even if they weren't positive, let's say. So our coworkers number is down. And so that puts a lot more stress on the people that are there during the time. So all around mentality wise trying to stay positive, but it has definitely been hard and emotional and physical and everything is just draining on the healthcare.

SM: Alright, have you or any of your coworkers missed time from work because of the COVID
Have any of you gotten it at all or?

CN: Right away, I kinda did an every other week thing because I was newly pregnant, and I just didn't want. We didn't know anything really about COVID. So there was a few co workers that we kind of took every other week off, just to be safe, you know? And then everything went back to normal things were good. And then I would say like in the last month, we've had a good handful of people. Because if you have to fill out a survey every single time you come into work, saying Did you take your temperature? Do you have any of these symptoms? Have you been exposed? Has the health employee health gotten a hold of you County Health letting you know you've been exposed outside of work? And if you answer yes to any of those questions, sore throat, fever, body aches, loss of taste, or smell, you have to go home, and you cannot return back to work until you get a negative test. And also, if you've been exposed outside of work, you have to wait for employee help to get a hold of you, which is usually a few days, and then you have to get tested. And then if it comes back negative, you have to continue to get tested every 72 hours for you to be able to stay at work.

SM: Alright, have you have you. How does having employees out affect your job? Does it make the actual job harder or is it more of just a scheduling issue? What kind of issues does that present?

CN: So the thing about a hospital is we have many different departments. So we have an emergency room department, we have our family practice in urgent care department and imaging. And then we have our outpatient in orthopedics, we also still have surgeries that we have to go in on. So it is definitely very difficult. Even if you lose one person, you have to adjust because obviously, the emergency room needs numbers, because we are just running our butts off. So if we lose one of those, we have to pull from a different department or shut down a different department completely. So it's definitely mentally and physically straining almost every single day. I mean, for the last two weeks, we've at least had two to three people out. And then also, we're open 24 seven because it is a hospital. So we have if we have any issues with the evening text, or the overnight text, we have to pull from the day shift and you know, people that have families, they're having to work different hours than what they're used to. So it's an I'm three weeks for my due date. And so being very pregnant during all of this is more like definitely straining on my body. And I mean, it's hard for everyone, but it definitely affects it every single day, we'll never be back to full staff probably for a long time, because flu is going to hit and all of that. So it's going to be happening for a while.

SM: Yeah, it does indeed look like that. Speaking on your pregnancy, if you're willing to what affects mentally, um, you know, you're pregnant, you're about to have a child, what effects mentally does something like a pandemic have on that experience on top of everything it already is?

CN: So this is our first baby, we actually just got married in February. So thankfully, we got through that before everything hit. But definitely being pregnant, you know, not being able to see

your family as much or your friends or doing things or your baby showers aren't normal. Thankfully, my husband has been able to come with me to my appointments if we wanted to. And he did come to a few. And then kind of it's just stressful thinking about all the restrictions that are going to happen when we're at the hospital, my husband shouldn't be leaving, some hospitals don't allow your husband's to come back or whoever your person is your support person, if they leave the hospital while you're there. They're not allowed to come back and you're just kind of there by yourself. So that's definitely been hard. And then also with us being going to deliver one flu season starts we have that to worry about as well. But COVID definitely has affected and it's made it definitely a lot harder. And you just worry especially about me working in the healthcare is, you know, I don't want to get it I don't want to have to take even more precautions in the hospital, I have three weeks left till my due date, I have thankfully and have not gotten it yet. And it would be absolutely horrible. If I were to while at the hospital because they take extra precautions. Baby has to be six feet away. I have to wear a mask if I'm breastfeeding, all of that stuff. So not very mentality wise good for a new mom, I feel like and you worry about postpartum depression on top of it, and it's going to be during the winter time. So yeah, there's a lot I definitely worry. And it's I'm trying not to stress but it definitely has taken a big toll on I feel like anyone that's a parent or a new parent or pregnant.

SM: Make sense. What would you say, has been your biggest challenge or challenges since the beginning of COVID? With any aspect of your life.

CN: I would have to say I really like to interact with my friends and I'm a very social person, I like to go have fires do this do that. So that's definitely been a downfall of not seeing people. I

have one of my best friend that lives in Arizona and usually we get together either she flies here, I fly there a few times a year. And obviously that has not happened yet. Seeing kind of grandparents or elderly people or just and also it's for my safety but wearing a mask 24/7 as well, you know with the acne and then you worry about your self image on top of it. And so pretty much the social aspect and we're doing it just to be safe and we it's been working because neither me or my husband have gotten sick yet. So we're hoping to keep it that way.

SM: Well, that is very good to hear for obvious reasons. Have you or anyone around you changed any of your opinions about COVID as it's gone through as we've gotten more information, have you realized your opinions on a change at all?

CN: I've always kind of taken it pretty serious just because I work in the healthcare. So I've seen the patient's turn, you know, they come in day one of having COVID, or they get tested positive. And then like five days later, they come back. And it's just completely different person health wise, even if they have underlying conditions or not. I mean, we have inpatient. So the ones that are covid positive, they're up on our floor, and we have to continue to image them through their stay to see their lungs. And I think just seeing the lungs go from what I can see looking pretty normal to not good at all. So my opinion, myself has always stayed pretty good. Like, I've always kind of listened and better to be safe than sorry, is how I kind of I've always viewed it. My husband's right away was, you know, when people don't work in health care, they don't understand because they don't see that sick patient in front of them. Like I see that and all of that. So it kind of took him a little bit, but I think he takes a little bit more serious. Unfortunately, his grandpa has it right now. And he is 90, but he's in the hospital. And he's doing okay. But I think

unfortunately, sometimes it takes it to hit home for people to understand and value what is important.

SM: I agree, I think a lot of people are experiencing it for the first time. You had mentioned viewing the lungs of your patients when they come in and seeing that difference. Have you noticed any other differences? Is there anything else interesting that you've seen through your job with COVID?

CN: You mean, like patient wise, like how? Yeah, I guess I would say, you know, unfortunately, the depression and the just like the sadness on people's faces, is just, you know, they don't want to be in that state, you know, you could honestly catch it, they've done everything they can to not get it, they wear a mask all the time they do this, they do that. But sometimes it's not, it just doesn't work. And you have those patients come in, and they're like, I tried everything I could, and you know, and they're in that position, and they feel guilty of some sort. And so it's really hard to see the mentality of my patients as well, because it's not any easier on them. It is is and me seeing it every single day.

SM: How would you say COVID-19, if at all has affected your relationship with family apart from not being able to see them physically. Have you noticed any change in in relationship with family members and with anything regarding COVID.

CN: Not too much other than just physically not seeing them. Or you know, just not doing as much you can talk on the phone as much as you want. But you know, unfortunately, me living in

bloomer, I've kind of always lived away from my family for the most part. And so it's not like I was seeing them every single weekend and everything like that. We do live by my husband's family, we definitely don't see them as much they have a cabin up on the lake here. And usually, we would, we would go there quite often and hang out and everything like that. And it just didn't happen like it normally does this year. And then obviously, with Thanksgiving and Christmas coming up, we're kind of more than likely going to opt out just because it'll Thanksgiving, will be close to my due date. And then also after that baby will be here. And with babies, you have to worry about a lot other than COVID, the influenza and RSV and everything like that. So I mean, you can call as much as you want, but sometimes it still isn't enough and we still haven't. So I lost my dad and my grandfather this year. My dad like right before COVID and then my grandpa, like a month after my grandpa never wanted to have anything. So we kind of just had a small thing for him this summer. But my dad's his celebration of life was supposed to be the weekend that everything got shut down. So it was like that initial thing. It was like the middle of March, we had scheduled it in Hayward everything like that. And then that Wednesday is when they cut everything down. And so just to be safe, we went to postpone it. Well, how do you postpone it when things aren't getting better, and they're getting worse? And you just keep pushing it back. So unfortunately, we haven't had that closure yet, which doesn't make it any easier. But I don't, what else do you do?

SM: Yeah, very understandable, especially right at the beginning when you don't quite understand you don't know how serious it is, how dangerous that could be how easily it spreads and how to stop the spread necessarily right away either. Speaking of scheduling events, how has

obviously there's a lot of events that go on throughout a pregnancy, baby shower, things like that. How has COVID affected scheduling things like that, and how you deal with it?

CN: Well, thankfully, already, I was going to have to baby showers because like I said, My husband's family's around here and then mines in Hayward. So thankfully, we weren't going to have one huge one. But unfortunately, my guest list probably for both was cut in half, if not more. And so they didn't really get to celebrate, you know, I had to pick and choose, which is never fun to do, like, how do you choose who's most important when you want everyone there? So yeah, the numbers definitely got cut in half. And then you know, come the day of there was a lot of people that didn't show up, because they didn't feel comfortable. And that is completely fine with me, I just kind of gave everyone the option for mine and did like an open house. So they could come and go as they please. But it was mentality wise, it was a little like, not frustrating, because I understand everyone's doing it to be safe. But once again, it was one of those things that I kind of got taken away from me, because of COVID, which is, for all the right reasons, it's just hard. And there was a wedding that I was supposed to be in at the end of May. And they postponed it until the day before our due date. And even with her, I don't really know what's going to happen, because it's only three weeks away, and the numbers are not getting any better. And so, you know, just the stress of anyone that's having a baby or getting married or had any big, I mean, college graduation, high school, it's probably been a very mental breaking year, and you just kind of got a truck through it.

SM: You did mention the numbers going up. A lot of the news surrounding Wisconsin especially has been that it's the new epicenter for the virus, at least right now. And probably in the near

future, what kind of an effect is that have? Knowing that there's 50 states and you're in one of the ones that is that that is in one of the worst positions possible? What kind of effect does that have?

CN: It's kind of like frustrating, a little bit, you can't control what everyone's going to do, it's their own life. Like, even if we shut everything down, people could stop get together all they want, you know, everything like that, I mean life is still gonna happen, you have those people out there, that, you know, they're gonna just live every day, because you just never know type of thing. It is definitely a little frustrating, because I feel like a lot of it has to do with selfishness, and the numbers going up. Like is going out and drinking really the most important right now. You know, it's just, but I can't judge because, you know, I'm pregnant. So obviously, I can't drink. So I don't really know what this would have been like, I'm sorry. Is it still going? Okay. I don't know what this year would have been like for me not pregnant. But just the fact of like I said, my friend that lives in Arizona, she they've had almost everything shut down, and their numbers aren't really getting any better. So it's hard to say. But being from the one that's one of the top is kind of like [ehhhh].

SM: You mentioned the numbers rising, kind of all around, and then also, that you mentioned people going out and drinking. Do you sympathize with those people at all? Do you feel like they do you feel like a part of what they're saying makes sense? Or do you think that across the board, they're just being kind of ridiculous, I guess.

CN: I think it's fine if someone wants to put their own health at risk, like if you want to go to the bar, and you want to have a drink, and you want to have the chance of getting it, just like at a

grocery store. I mean you honestly can get it wherever I'm not saying it's just set the bar. But if that's something you want to put your own health at risk, then I am all for that because it's your choice, but it's the one that you know continue to go around the elderly or the people that already are immune compromised, and they don't take precautions, then yes I think that's a little selfish. And it's the same with every year with the flu as well on top of COVID you know, some people just you don't get affected by it so you don't think you have to worry. Well, you have to worry about all these people you come in contact with, like my husband's Grandpa, you know, he has it. Well, he got it from one of his children, you know coming to the house and all of that and, but it's also I look at it as you know you can choose to not have visitors as well. That's like what we're choosing when the baby comes, you know, sorry, we're just going to keep it with our household and see how it goes. And you know, so you could draw that line right away, like, you know we won't be leaving the house and this is this, you invite people in, you also are taking the risk of them having it.

SM: Of course, that makes sense. Speaking about after the pregnancy and staying home and not allowing visitors, how long do you plan on staying home and trying to kind of protect against anything from the outside or going back to work or certain risks like that.

CN: So I have 12 weeks off of work. And then obviously, I don't really have a choice, I'm going to go back, so baby will be going to daycare after that. But our plan kind of is, you know, influenza, and RSV is very deadly to infants. And so that's one of my more main concerns with the baby, not really COVID, just because from the statistics and things I've seen, they don't really talk too much about COVID-19 and infants. But what our plan is, is we'll probably just take a

few weeks to ourselves, try to figure everything out, see how the flu rates and all of that are going and then more than likely, we'll probably just ask grandparents and you know any other family to just maybe wear a mask when they're holding the baby, just because babies are born with no immune system. So I would just hate and in that fact to is we X-ray, all the infants that come in with COVID, and influenza and RSV, and it's not fun to see them in that state, nor do I want my baby to be in that state ever. So that's kind of our plan is just kinda take it day by day, you don't know you obviously can't shelter, or I don't want to shelter, you know, my baby for those full 12 weeks because they go to daycare and they have the workers there and the other babies there. So we'll probably just do a few weeks, see how we're feeling and go from there. Because then Christmas, obviously is three weeks after as well. There's never a right answer to anything. So it's going to be hard, but hopefully baby stays safe and that's all we can ask.

SM: Yeah, that seems to be a pretty common theme with COVID is they're not really being the perfect answer for any situation. It's all risk reward weighing, you know, what's right when to do it. So I'm sure with something as serious as that it's, it's a lot of weight, mentally. What have been, as far as information throughout the pandemic, what have been your primary sources? Um, have you been following up a lot? Have you been following the numbers a lot? Or have you kind of just gotten used to it and you you're not paying much attention?

CN: Yeah, I've honestly never really been one to follow the numbers. I'm more of, you know what's going to happen is going to happen. And so no not really, the only thing I can really tell you is that obviously the number of patients that come in and our COVID positive have increased tremendously. I mean it took us at the hospital anyways almost seven months for this to be around for us to hit. And we're just starting our peak now. So the only numbers I've really

ever paid attention to is the ones that are continuing to come through the ER and almost every single one of them are COVID positive.

SM: So you've been focusing more on a local level, as far as statistics rather than a nationwide or even a statewide level?

CN: Yeah, I honestly couldn't really even tell you about any other states or anything like that other than my friend that lives in Arizona, but that's about it.

SM: What do you think that the media as much as you do pay attention. Do you feel that the the media is putting the emphasis on the right places as far as covering COVID and the factors surrounding it? Do you feel like as a society we have done a good job with it? Or do you feel like there's been some failings?

CN: That's kind of hard to say, but I feel like there has been some failings because you know and people are gonna make their own decisions no matter what. But I just feel like they would really urge you know, right away even you you have one tiny symptom, please stay home. Or you know don't go around those people that can get it and things like that. Like I was just at a bridal shower on Saturday, and my husband's mom. gotten a hold of me and said that someone that was there tested positive, and that was only four days ago. So she already got her results back. So that means she would have gotten tested probably on Monday. You know, so was she really not feeling that good on Saturday and shouldn't have came but came anyways, you know and you know you have to worry about all those people. I'm so sometimes I wish they kind of would say

how important it is. And every year with the flu as well, like your tiny little sickness might not be much but to someone else it's going to be a lot more.

SM: That makes sense, especially with spreading obviously like you just said it affects everyone differently. Kind of speaking on the societal change and reaction to it. Have you noticed or how do you feel your local and state elected officials, do you feel like they've been doing everything they could to move in the right direction? Or do you feel like there's been any failings there at all?

CN: That's hard to because how do you tell a business that they can't be open anymore, because they don't matter, or how many small businesses have shut down. So I feel like once again, it's a human's choice that coffee shops open, you want to take the risk and go in and do that you know, and a lot of them around here anyways, that you have to have a mask to go in. And I think it is ridiculous. The thing that just does make me mad is all they're asking you to do is put a mask on your face. I understand that you know you have your freedom and everything like that. But that's what they're trying to do to keep their employees safe. And I don't know how many places I've been in that people walk in and be like, I don't follow the rules I'm not wearing a mask, and it's like well then don't go into that establishment. Like you know go be extra unsafe somewhere else, is the way I look at it. I don't know I wear a mask, I wear two masks and a body suit and a face shield 20,30,40 times a day taking care of these COVID patients. So to me if I can do it to make others around me feel safer, because you know I still go places I go to the grocery store. I'll stop at the coffee shop. But if I can take the extra precautions to do it then I will. And I feel like if everyone wasn't so stubborn, it might make it the world might be a little different right now

than what it is. And if everyone could kind of walk through the hospitals and see what we have to deal with, and the place that maybe their family could be in, then I think life would be a lot different.

SM: You mentioned people arguing with business owners when they ask them to wear a mask, dealing with issues with people not following the guidelines not wearing a mask. We see in some counties throughout Wisconsin, like Sawyer where the where the sheriff said he wasn't going to enforce any of these policies. Do you feel like there needs to be more legal repercussions for ignoring these guidelines? Or do you feel like that's an overreach of government power?

CN: I feel like it's almost an overreach, just because the flu has still happened every single year. And I'm not trying to compare the flu with COVID at all. But that's been a sickness that has been around and is very deadly. And we've never taken the precautions to enforce mask wearing for that before or extra washing hands or closing things down. And that death rate every single year is quite high. So it's hard. It's very hard to say. But once again, I just feel like if you're, you know, I don't know everyone should be able to do what they want. But I just wish they would think about others or just see how hard it hits some families and people would probably change their mind.

SM: That's that's a that's a fair point. So kind of as a wrap up here. Have you viewed or experienced or observed any major changes in that you think will stick with you as far as your lifestyle, your friends lifestyle, your family's lifestyle, have you viewed and seen and noticed a

difference that you feel like will outlast the pandemic on a personal level but also on a societal level?

CN: Yeah, I've kind of said you know, what will normal life be again? I don't think there will ever be a normal again. I don't really know what will happen mask wise, like if that's just gonna be a forever thing or, you know, when do you stop doing that because you have flu hit and then flu sometimes can stay around till April or May. You know we have no idea COVID what's going to happen with all of that. So, definitely, my life wise probably will change forever. Just being you know just safer all around. It's not like I was selfish before, but a little bit I feel like until you bring a little one into the world, or you have like a very elderly or super sick family member, you just don't really understand the struggles of all the flu's and just how sad to watch someone go completely downhill within days. So yeah, I think it'll be a, you know forever thing in my life anyways. Like social wise like I said. Who knows when the mask thing if it'll ever go away, or if it's just going to be a forever normal thing. And I hope you know schooling wise can get a little bit better because I just feel so bad. I could never imagine being in school or in college and having to deal with all of this on top of it and learning. It's just crazy. And it's just mind blowing when you think about it.

SM: Yes very crazy. There is a lot going on and a lot of changes constant will be very interesting to see what those changes affect moving forward and how long they last. Thank you so much for joining me and giving your perspective on how COVID has affected your life on a personal level. And also on a societal level as well. You have very valuable insights given not only your

profession, but also your age and all the other factors you have in your life including your pregnancy. So thank you a lot for joining me.

CN: Thank you