

Transcription

Production Conversations COVID 19
Episode Frontline Profiles EMS
Duration 06:17
Deliver format H264

The battle against the Covid 19 Virus is being fought on many fronts, But in addition to hearing about the advice and rules for staying safe I think it is helpful to hear from some of the people on the front line risking their lives to save others.

I have been a paramedic in Skagit County for almost nine-years. I have been a paramedic for ten and then was an EMT for about three before that.

How is your day different now with the Covid crisis going on, how has that affected you?

At work things are different just when we get to work in the morning we are doing what's called a symptom tracker, we take our temperatures, we fill out a questionnaire about whether we are healthy or not to make sure that we are okay to be at work, that we are healthy to be at work. We also do that in the evening. You might not be able to see but our ambulances are a little bit different, we got some different personal protective equipment. We have taped off the back so that everything is compartmentalized. We are practicing social distancing at work, so our shift has to spend time separate. Which we don't like to do, we are all pretty close knit, so it's kind of a bummer to have to spend time apart, we prefer to really be together and share time during the day.

What are the types of calls you are getting now, I guess regular emergencies still happen, Covid or no Covid?

They do, Covid or no Covid there are still strokes, cardiac arrests, heart attacks, respiratory emergencies, people still fall down, they still get in car accidents, all sorts of things like that still happen. So we have our normal call volume although I would say that some of the less acute emergencies aren't calling as often, which gives us some freedom to, to have time to deal with the more Covid related emergencies that we are seeing.

What kind of Covid emergencies do you get? Are most of them people concerned or do you get people contacting you that are having actual respiratory problems?

We see a lot of people who are concerned about symptoms that they feel may be Covid and they are wondering what they should be doing. We also have seen a few Covid positive people, some who knew they were Covid positive, others who didn't, who were tested and found out that they were later. We have seen some significant respiratory emergencies as well as some with much less acute symptoms.

You don't do testing yourself do you?

We don't. We notify the emergency room when we call there if we have any reason to believe that this patient may have been exposed to Covid or if they are displaying any Covid symptoms and they have been really good at testing that person as soon as they arrive at the ER in order to get those test results back as soon as they can.

What would you say are some of the challenges that first responders face in terms of being able to keep a healthy workforce yourself?

Yeah, if we are not healthy we can't help anyone in the community, so we have to really work hard to make sure that we are staying healthy so a lot of it starts with wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment when we are on calls. Our dispatchers do a really great job of asking questions about possible exposure to Covid or possible symptoms and on this fancy computer it shows us what the dispatchers are learning from whoever is calling 911 and that allows us to make sure we are wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment to every call.

Is this the first time you have been doing something where there has been such a risk to yourselves?

I think we take risks in our job in a lot of different ways every day. Whether it's on a fire or dealing with patients with really infectious diseases, or anything like that, there is always an assemblance of risk that's involved so we just come to work and do the best that we can and try to make good choices about what we wear to protect ourselves and to protect the community. But, try not to think about it I guess too much, at least not enough to cause any panic or fear and just try to make educated and wise decisions, and listen to the people who know more than I do about what the best practices are, or how to deal with it.

Is there any kind of message you have for people when they call 911?

I think that the more of the dispatchers' questions they can answer about if they were possibly exposed, if not, if they are having any symptoms, any fever, shortness of breath. They will ask a whole slough of questions and if you answer those as honestly as you can that really helps us make a good assessment of what it needs to look like for us.

So can I ask you, how this differs, what additional equipment you have in terms of Covid?

Yeah you see more readily available full face goggles here, face masks, things that we don't usually carry, especially not sitting on the shelf readily available for everything. This is a cabinet of gowns and tyvek suits, booties for over your boots, hair nets, all sorts of things like that. We always carry this, but i think it is definitely more stocked and you are seeing more use out of the cabinet than we normally would use. Other than that we are sealed off upfront here, you might be able to see that there's some visclean up there to seal the front from the patient compartment. Just in case we do have someone who is Covid positive so there is no exposure to whomever is in the front.