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**INT 0357**

**Interview with Cathrine Solomon, RN**

**Interviewed by Michala Biondi**

**October 2, 2020**

- MB: Hi, this is Michala Biondi from the Aufses Archives, and I'm interviewing Cathrine Solomon, who's a coworker here at the Hospital. Catherine, I just want to let you know that if you provide any personal health information, that it is no longer covered by HIPAA in this recording, and we would ask you to not really reveal any health information of anybody else, any details, just because that makes it difficult. Why don't you start with telling me what your job title is and what your job involves at the Hospital?
- CS: My name is Cathrine Solomon, again, I am a registered nurse. I actually work with the Multiple Myeloma Program, and [in] my current position, I am a stem cell transplant coordinator.
- MB: What does your day entail, what kind of activities do you do?
- CS: Basically I get referrals from our Attendings, for our patients who need stem cells collected as well as stem cell transplants. So I meet with patients daily, whether it's in-patient or out-patient in the clinic, as well as seeing my patients actually getting their stem cells in the Apheresis Center.
- MB: Interesting. How did your job change during the Covid pandemic, or the condensed time we've had of it at the hospital?
- CS: Basically, to be honest, I wasn't there during the beginning part, because I actually had Covid myself, and was not there. However, upon return, we did not have as much patients, of course, because this is more elective, unless it was an emergency, or they had to have a stem cell transplant. When I came back, and the numbers started getting lower here in New York, that's when we started getting more stem cell harvests and transplants. Again, now it's going back to normal in terms of the numbers, but since the Covid numbers are starting to rise again, now we're kind of... The patients are a little weary now, and yeah.
- MB: Wow, okay. Would you like to tell us a little bit about your own experience with having Covid? How long did you have it, what happened, were you hospitalized, et cetera?
- CS: I actually had Covid, I started having symptoms March 8th. I believe I had gotten it from emergency room, to be honest, yeah. My dad had to go to the emergency room because he had a procedure done, and I picked him up from the emergency room. The following week I started getting sick. It was a rollercoaster. Basically, I had everything that you can think of. I'm not sure if you know, but they say that Covid, it attacks different parts of your body. So it could be GI, meaning your stomach, and then your head, with headaches and all these

different things. I had everything, it initially started with flu-like symptoms, like a low-grade fever, and then body aches, and then I started getting a little bit better, I thought. And then basically it turned into getting really bad headaches, starting to throw up, having diarrhea.

I had pins and needles in my legs and arms, so I was very weak. And then the last portion of that in April, I was having high-grade fevers, and then it went to about 106. So I actually have been to the emergency room three times, because my primary had wanted me to go. And so that third time, going to the ER, was actually when they diagnosed me positive from the Covid swab, because the Covid swabs I had prior were negative.

MB: Wow, that's a surprise.

CS: Yeah. And the doctors, when I was at the ER they said, "I'm sure you have it," even though it was a negative. During this period of time, it was about two months, March, April, May, I went back to work, however I couldn't even walk a block. I was short of breath after each word, I would have to take a breath. I'm currently on pump now, I still am not back to normal. I am fatigued every day. I still do get random chest tightness as well. I was never intubated, but I did have oxygen on when I did go to the emergency room. So it was a lot, and during this period of time I also lost my parents to Covid, as well as my uncle.

MB: I'm sorry to hear that, really, that's very sad. Were you able to be with them at all? It doesn't sound like you probably were.

CS: Unfortunately not. My parents actually had went to the emergency room together, when they weren't really feeling well. My dad was admitted first for pneumonia, and then they sent my mother home. Unfortunately I was at my apartment, and I was really worried, so because I was already having symptoms I kind of said, "I don't care, I need to see my mother, make sure she's okay." I went there, and because I'm a nurse I took her vital signs and all that, and unfortunately that following day I had to call 911, and they brought her to the hospital. The day later, my father was intubated that morning and my mother in the afternoon, so I couldn't visit-

MB: Oh my gosh.

CS: ... and see either one of them, because I was in quarantine myself.

MB: So you spent most of your illness at home then?

CS: Yes, for those two months.

MB: You mentioned you were on a pump. What does that mean?

CS: I was on an Albuterol pump for asthma, so I was using it every four hours, so that I can breathe, basically.

- MB: Yeah, basically. You said you were out of... You were suffering with it for two months solid?
- CS: Yes.
- MB: That's a very long time.
- CS: March 8th I started, and I went back to work beginning of May, and I still wasn't 100% when I went back. I was still short of breath, walking. I couldn't walk a block, I would have to stop every couple of feet, and then I still had to use my pump, I still had chest tightness, I still had a lingering cough. It's about six, seven months now, and finally that cough has gone away, but I still do have that chest tightness and fatigue.
- MB: And you have problems breathing, the chest tightness, and is the breathing-
- CS: Yeah, once in a while it can just come out of nowhere, to be honest. I developed something called costochondritis, which is basically inflammation of the ribs from coughing, so I have pain in my ribs as well.
- MB: Not nice.
- CS: In turn I also get random headaches from Covid, we also say it's 'Covid Brain,' where we have a brain fog and I forget a lot of things. So being back at work has helped me kind of exercise my brain, so that I'm getting back to where I was before. Because right after I did not remember words, everything was blurry, I just did not remember anything. But now, after seven months now finally getting back to normal in terms of remembering things. I still do forget some things here and there, but it's much better than before.
- MB: That sounds like a really hard thing to have to deal with, I'm so sorry. Do you have siblings? Did you have help while you were at home, people to come and help you a bit?
- CS: I have a sister, and my brother-in-law and my nieces. They live in Westchester however, so it's about like an hour or so away. So I actually was in my apartment with my boyfriend, and fortunately he took off of work and he... Because he started getting headaches too, and so he was the one to basically take care of me, because I wasn't eating, I wasn't drinking, I wasn't able to get up, anything.
- MB: Well I'm glad he was able to do that for you.
- CS: Me too.
- MB: Wow. How do you react when people say things like, "Covid is just a flu, it's just a little flu?"
- CS: I get angry, I really do, to be honest. I just say, "To be honest, I can't change anyone's mind, and I know what I went through, and our family went through. What I can tell you is I don't

wish that experience on anyone, because you're not able to hold them, you're not able to see them in-person, not talk to them because... If they're actually vented." As much as people want to think different things or don't believe in it or think it's a hoax, it's real, and I do tell people that, it is real, and I went through all the symptoms that one can have. Yes, I wasn't intubated, yes, I didn't die, but I could have, and that's the main thing that people don't understand. With flu, a lot of us have had the flu, and you get that achiness. But that was just the beginning symptoms for me, and then it progressed, so it really isn't like the flu as much as people want to say it is.

Usually, a lot of people that feel this way, they haven't known somebody personally that has been affected. And when it is your family, in my case, both my parents passed away within two weeks of each other, and then after that my uncle a week later, it's real. I can't change people's minds, but I can tell my story, and that's why I'm here today to speak to you, to let people know about my story.

MB: And I appreciate that, I'm glad to document your story and the severity of the illness that can happen. You mentioned that you had a fever up to 106.

CS: Yes.

MB: I didn't think we could exist at that level, what did that... This may be a stupid question, but what did that feel like?

CS: To be honest I was out of it, I was sleeping. My boyfriend told me that I was shivering, and I told him that I was still cold, even though the room was probably... He explained to me that as soon as he opened the door, it was like a sauna. As soon as he opened the door he just started sweating, profuse sweat, and he would say I was shivering and said I was still cold, and he already had like three blankets on me, and the heater was high, it was so hot. He took my temperature probably every hour or so, or every... At that time, all I remember was, he just was nudging me and he was like, "Babe, babe? How can I bring your fever down quickly?" I'm sorry, are you there? [reaction to screen blip-technical difficulty] Sorry.

MB: Yes, I'm here.

CS: So I was out of it, like I said, because of the brain fog, and I was just weak. And I just looked up at him and I said, "Put me in the shower." So he put me literally in... He pulled me into the cold, cold shower, and it brought it down a little bit, and he said, "It's still 103," or something like that. I said, "Give me Tylenol," even though I just took Tylenol probably around two hours before that, for my regular fever. So basically, and also I didn't even know it went up this high, he lied to me. He didn't tell me the temperature, I found out a couple of months later that it was that high, and that's why he put me in the shower.

MB: Wow.

- CS: Honestly I didn't remember that when he woke me up, I just said that, because he was really concerned. He was like, "I need it to go down fast." But in my mind it didn't register that, "Oh, my temperature could have been that high," you know?
- MB: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- CS: Because I was so weak. That was the same day I went to the emergency room, right after that, yeah.
- MB: What did they do for you in the emergency room?
- CS: This was the last one. The first time I went to the emergency room I was on oxygen, they gave me steroids, IV steroids, the albuterol pump like I said. They gave me three boluses, meaning IV fluid, so the three big bags, one liter bag-
- MB: Wow, mm-hmm (affirmative).
- CS: ... because I was so dehydrated, and of course my oxygen was probably low. But to be honest, I don't remember how low it was that first time. And then I don't even know how I drove myself to the ER, but I know I had to go, because I was on the phone with my primary, and she told me to go. That was I believe the second time, for second time, and then the last time was the one I was just talking about, when I had the 106 fever. But it had come down once I got to the ED, because I took the extra Tylenol, and I was taking extra strength, two tabs.
- MB: Oh my goodness.
- CS: Yeah, mm-hmm (affirmative).
- MB: That's heavy duty.
- CS: It was heavy duty, and I already probably took that about two to three hours even before that. So that just shows you how high my fever was, and how sick I was at that time. I went to the ED, and same thing again, IV fluids. But this time, because I was having diarrhea and vomiting, I couldn't keep anything down. They gave me Zofran, which is an anti-emmenic, I'm like, "For nausea?" They also gave me something for my stomach called Protonix. All this is IV, nothing by mouth. The only thing they gave me by mouth was Tylenol, and I believe they had probably given me antibiotics again. I was still using albuterol as well. And then I basically was just practicing my breathing, because my oxygen did go low, it went to 88, 88%. Usually we want it... Excuse me, to be at least 90, you know?
- MB: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

CS: Especially if you're breathing on your own, it should be much higher, like 95 to 100, you know?

MB: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

CS: But like I said, I was weak, so the doctor made me walk from one end of the room to the other, to see how low it went. She was debating on admitting me that day, and I said, "No no no," because I was scared. I was like, "Let me do my breathing exercises." And so I did them, and eventually it went back up to 92%. So she said, "Okay, fine," that they would just watch me, give me my IV fluids and all that, take my blood work and then send me home once I was stable.

MB: Why were you afraid to stay in the hospital?

CS: I was afraid to get intubated, because I lost my parents. So that was the reason why, it was scary. It really was scary.

MB: Yeah, I'm getting upset for you! That's a very emotional story, and I'm glad you're well.

CS: Thank you.

MB: I'm glad you're feeling better. I haven't heard anything about... Early on, maybe in May they were talking about the ability to get re-infected if you had it once. I haven't heard anything about that, or if they haven't made any statements. Do you know if they've come to any further conclusions about whether one can be reinfected?

CS: To be honest, I don't know as of yet. However, I'm going to tell you that I haven't been reinfected. However, I did get sick a couple of weeks ago, by the aches again, the bad headaches that I call Covid Headaches where I can't do anything, and I just felt like I had a really bad cold. I feel as though I wasn't reinfected and I had a Covid swab as well, because I wanted to make sure, I'm a PCP. But I feel as though since I did have Covid, like I said before, I'm not the same. So I feel I'm more susceptible to be getting sick, even though I have high antibodies, it's not for anything else, like the common cold and this and that. I feel as though yes, I have antibodies, but probably to Covid, but not to any other virus if I get something else, you know?

MB: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

CS: I want people to know that, that just because you had Covid doesn't mean that you're invincible. I have several nurses who did not have antibodies, so I'm not saying that it's impossible to get reinfected.

MB: Is there anything else you want to tell us about your experience? I mean, you've been very frank and I appreciate that. But is there anything else that you've left out, or want to share?

CS: I just want to let everybody know that it is real, and that we have to tread cautiously still, wear the masks. If you are seeing family, because everything's getting lifted now, that's fine. But make sure that you, when you are around each other, that you're wearing a mask, or unless you know everybody is not having symptoms and has had swabs. Because most people now, here in New York, one time or another, have actually had a swab done, or antibody testing. I feel safe with my family, because I have been tested several times to be honest. I honestly don't even remember how many times I've had a Covid swab done anymore. It's been at least probably seven times already that I've had it within the past couple of months. I just also want to give my condolences to anyone else that has lost family.

And for the survivors - the long haulers, as we say, because I would be considered as a long hauler, to just fight, and know that it will get better. However, even though we may not get back to where we were pre-Covid, just, I am thankful to be alive.

MB: And I am thankful you're alive too, we need more of Cathrine Solomon's around to be our nurses, and take care of us, and tell the story, tell the truth. So again, my condolences on the loss of your family members, and thank you again for being so frank about your experience, and for doing this recording.

CS: Thank you for your time, Michala.

MB: Thank you. Bye bye.

CS: Bye bye, take care.

MB: You too, take care.