



Testimony 9/14/21 – NMHCA COVID impact

Good morning. Thank you, Chair, and members, for the opportunity to talk about my COVID experience. My name is Arlanda Yazzie. I am a certified med tech at Cedar Ridge, a 101-bed skilled nursing facility in Farmington NM. I've worked at Cedar Ridge for 2.5 years. We started hearing about and preparing for COVID in late February/early March 2020. We started testing for COVID in April. Our first COVID positive resident and staff were on April 17th. It took about one week to get a test result back and we lived in fear each week. We would eventually have 29 residents pass from COVID and 1 staff member. Our overall census would decrease to 38 during COVID peak in 2020.

Today, I want to tell you about my experience with COVID at Cedar Ridge.

I can just remember all the staff going outside and testing for Covid. At the time, we all were not aware of what was to come in the next weeks and months ahead. I remember the management team calling us all to inform us that we had several positive residents. They also stated that there were several staff members that tested positive, and they would be contacting those staff members personally. I got the call that I was one of the positive staff members. I was very scared for myself and my family. I was worried about what was going to happen with all the residents. I remember not having symptoms and was very worried about what was going to happen to me.

After my isolation at a hotel, I then was able to work, and I offered to work on the hot zone. The residents were very sick and passing away very fast. They would not eat or drink, they just seemed to lay there getting weaker every day. Wearing the PPE was very unpersonal for me. I was not able to hug and care for the residents like I had done before Covid hit the building. I remember changing my PPE and it being wet with sweat and tears. The sadness was overwhelming at times.

I knew I had to continue to take care of these residents as so many of my co-workers had left out of fear or were sick themselves. I can remember thinking "I am all the residents had to comfort them in their last moments as their loved ones peered in the window from outside". Day after day, the halls became more and more empty as residents passed away or were sent out to the hospital to never return. At one point, we had three empty halls that just housed the resident's belongings until it was deemed safe for families to remove from facility.

During the height of the outbreak, I stayed a hotel that was paid for by the company so that I could continue to work and keep my residents safe. I also had to keep myself isolated from my family in fear of infecting them. They were worried about me, and I missed seeing them, but we wanted to be safe. Looking back, it was very rewarding for me to have stayed and worked when others did not, I was the housekeeper, dietary aide, CNA, and family to those residents that had no one else. It warms my heart to know that families knew I was caring for their loved ones, when they could not be there holding their hands, as they passed away.

As I said earlier, staffing has been a concern during COVID and still is today. I am asked to pick up additional shifts, work short but everyone pitches in. It makes it hard for me to do my best with my residents. Even the Director of Nursing will work on the floor with us when we are short staffed. We all wish for the day when we have more staff to help as we continue to admit new patients. And we want to do our best for our residents.

It has also been a joy to watch the facility move back to being full again. We are back to families being able to visit per guidance, activities are being done that allows the residents to laugh and fellowship with their peers. The residents smiling faces and to hear them laugh and joke again is what brings me back every day.

Thank you to the Chair and Legislative Health and Human Services Committee for your time today.