

Speaker 1:

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Dr. Comilla Sasson:

Hi, my name is Comilla Sasson. I'm the Vice President for Science and Innovation for Emergency Cardiovascular Care, and today I'm very fortunate to be here with the Gustavo Flores.

Dr. Comilla Sasson:

Gustavo, do you want to introduce yourself?

Dr. Gustavo Flores:

Hi, thank you, and thank you for the American Heart Association to host this podcast. My name is Gustavo Flores. I'm a Training Center Coordinator, a Training Site Coordinator in Puerto Rico. I'm also a member of the Educational Science and Programs Subcommittee of the American Heart Association. I've been a volunteer, been instructor for almost 20 years and I volunteer at the national level for about 10 years now. We are in the midst of the COVID crisis, and I thank you for the opportunity to be here.

Dr. Comilla Sasson:

Thank you. Let's start first by just talking about how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Puerto Rico so far.

Dr. Gustavo Flores:

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted all of our daily operations. As we chat today, we are on a lockdown. We have been on lockdown for two weeks now, and it was extended for another two-week period, and we're not sure if it's going to be extended again as we're recording this. We are still in the early stages of the upward shift in the number of cases, so we are starting to see the storm clouds get closer.

Dr. Comilla Sasson:

Have you seen surges in both the cases, both in the community and also in the hospital as well?

Dr. Gustavo Flores:

Yes, there are some places where there are starting to be community outbreaks, so cases are growing exponentially on a daily basis. So we are certainly expecting a significant rise in the number of COVID-positive diagnosis as well as admissions to ICU beds.

Dr. Comilla Sasson:

I know you said that you've been a long-time trainer for the Heart Association. As the lockdown have happened, how has that impacted your ability to train?

Dr. Gustavo Flores:

The lockdown has affected everybody at the same time; therefore, we're not alone in this in the midst of this crisis. We have not been able to conduct training since the lockdown with the regulations. We have been encouraging participants to do HeartCode classes and then come for practice and testing as soon as the lockdown is ended. But that certainly has not been something that everybody will probably do, depending on language barriers as well as practicality of also being able to do it with the current workload. So, basically we have stopped training for the last two weeks as we speak. We're looking forward to renew it as soon as the lockdown is lifted.

Dr. Comilla Sasson:

What strategies have you used personally to keep in touch with your student?

Dr. Gustavo Flores:

One of the things we did early on was to create a blog post in our website detailing the best practices that we would be implementing in our day-to-day operations. And that has helped us maintain everybody aware of what's going on both inside and internal staff as well as for class participants. So, every time somebody has been asking us how is training going to be affected, we have a resource that we can quickly send even via text message to the person who's calling and say, "Look, here's all the detail you need to know with regards to hands-on practice, regards to wearing gloves, regards to not doing mouth to anything during class, with regards to bathroom breaks, frequent hand washing. And also recommendations, if you are not feeling well, there's no problem with rebooking you to a suitable date. We just have to manually move you, so feel free to email or call us and we'll gladly do that." So, it's very simple, but one word of advice to all the training centers out there is to communicate, communicate, communicate because your participants will likely benefit from that and appreciate that.

Dr. Comilla Sasson:

And more guidance comes out, I know we have put out community interim guidance as well as healthcare provider guidance and then just recently put out some joint guidance with the American Association of Pediatrics as well. How have you been able to communicate some of those changes in the science as well in the COVID outbreak?

Dr. Gustavo Flores:

We have embraced all the templates out there, not only the American Heart Association's guidelines, but also the clinical recommendations, the CDC recommendation, social distancing. As soon as the recommendation dropped to less than 10 persons in a same location, we immediately stopped our classes. We have discovered is that everybody is understanding, everybody's on board with the same crisis. So we've always been upfront with regards to some of the uncertainty about what's going to happen. We are willing and able to start operations tomorrow morning if the lockdown is lifted. We just got a call a few minutes ago and somebody was asking, "When is your next ACLS class?" It was, "Well, we have one as soon as the lockdown is lifted, but that's not up to us to determine if and when that's going to happen." Everybody has been very accepting of that circumstance, so we have been very grateful for understanding and willingness to be flexible.

Dr. Comilla Sasson:

I think that's accurate, transparent communication is so important. AHA also recently just extended recommended renewal dates for instructor cards that would now be extended. How has that helped you during this time?

Dr. Gustavo Flores:

Participants who are in need to immediately recertify are definitely welcoming this extension. Our local healthcare provider boards, professional boards have also extended the renewal dates or expanded the renewal period so that people who need to be at work are not taken off their rosters because of an expired card or an expiring professional license. So it's a crisis situation and I think that all the organizations, the American Heart Association, as well as professional boards, have stepped up to the challenge and said, "Well, this is how we can collaborate."

Dr. Comilla Sasson:

Now, how do you think the training network can plan for the continuing challenges that we might be anticipating, not only from the science changing literally day by day, but just even kind of how the trainings have had to be conducted. Do you have any tips for the training network on how to ride the waves, if you will?

Dr. Gustavo Flores:

This will be a matter of continuous discussion because COVID is here to stay, and we're witnessing one of those history moments. There is a before and after COVID. This will be the new normal for our foreseeable future. Therefore, some best practices that we're learning now or we're enforcing now or recommending now are becoming the new norm, both for healthcare providers but also for the general public. I'm expecting that the general public will be more wary of close contact, be more wary of frequent hand washing, some of these best practices that we have been advocating for the last few months. So definitely every activity that promotes or not only training but also other day-to-day activities, like the gyms or any sports, will face some challenges with regards to how we are interacting with our participants.

Dr. Gustavo Flores:

I do see the need to monitor the clinical effects of what's going on so that we can make better decisions with regards to what's the best way to proceed. We should be collecting data. Centers that are implementing protocol changes, for instance, PPE use and the effect on timely response and so forth. All those elements should be taken into consideration and look at what was the effect and then come to conclusions. If [inaudible 00:08:30] and it's safe and it works, then there's no reason why we cannot implement it and move forward as a best practice and keep doing it. But also I'm sure that as we collect more data, we will see some challenges that we will need to look into, and hopefully collectively a good number of thinking heads will come up with clever solutions.

Dr. Comilla Sasson:

Well, thank you so much, Dr. Flores, for everything that you're doing, both in terms of helping us keep up to date on training network activities and also more importantly just for your leadership and service to the American Heart Association for so many years. It's been so wonderful getting to work with you.

Dr. Gustavo Flores:

Thank you, and thank you for the opportunity to not only be part of this ongoing process, but also share some thoughts with the training network. I'm sure that as we get more information from the network itself, we will also be able to better address the particular needs.

Dr. Comilla Sasson:

Thank you.

Speaker 1:

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