HEALTHIER YOU

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Season 1: Episode 9: Pedestrian Safety

Welcome to Healthier You by Vanderbilt Health & Wellness, a podcast to help Vanderbilt faculty and staff with their healthiest lives.

JH: This is Julie Hurst. I am a nurse practitioner in the Occupational Health department and here today to discuss campus safety for employees with Patrick Conwell, major of the campus precinct and Vanderbilt University Public Safety.

I am so glad to have our listeners here with us today, especially those that are new to campus. Our goal is to provide you with some local data, as well as some tips to navigate this bustling campus with safety in mind.

Welcome, Patrick, and thank you for giving your time to chat with us today about this important topic.

PC: Thank you for having me.

JH: We are just going to start with some basics today, and then just move into more specific safety topics. So, we will just jump right in.

PC: Perfect.

JH: So, Patrick what advice would you give employees right now, just entering and leaving campus, to maintain their safety to and from work, whether they are walking, biking, driving, any of those things?

PC: Yeah, great question! So, first, just a little bit off topic, I will talk about the construction pieces.

JH: Yes.

PC: Specifically, the road construction, the road closures that we have seen. So, first of all, I fully recognize that it is a very big hassle, and it is not convenient for anyone right now to get around the campus. You know, we work very diligently to make the traffic as least bad as we can. So, I am not going to say it is good. I fully recognize it is not good, but we work very diligently to try to make traffic as least bad as we can around the campus. So, I would preface with that real quick.

JH: Construction isn't forever.

PC: It feels like it, right? But, it's not. It's not. But that leads into the safety component. So, I think, I have one general statement on that, and one specific statement on that. So, the general statement is just understanding that we have all of this construction on campus, that everyone be patient, and try to work together and navigate as best as we can. So, just recognizing that we value all of those different types of transportation on campus and we want everyone to be safe. So, just slow down, take a little bit of extra time. You know, if it takes you an extra 90 seconds to get through an intersection safely versus you know, it is going to take you 4 hours to have a police report done, and go to the hospital, and all of these other things. So, just slow down a little bit and make sure that we are getting there safely.

JH: Excellent.

PC: Statistically, when we talk about pedestrians specifically, so, pedestrians, bicycles, scooters versus a vehicle, that the number one cause, by a pretty significant margin, is when a driver is turning left at an intersection and there is a pedestrian that is crossing the street to the driver's left. If you think about your vehicle, there is a pillar that is right there, and it is hard to see. So, there is a physical barrier to your vision to your left, and that is the number one cause when we see a pedestrian that was struck by a vehicle, it was a driver that was turning left.

JH: Isn't that interesting?

PC: It is. So, both for pedestrians and drivers, I ask, if you are a pedestrian and you see a driver making a left turn, or if you are driver and you are making a left turn, is to take that extra second to look, take a second glance.

JH: Be more cautious.

PC: Absolutely. Just confirm that there is not someone who just happened to be lined up in your pillar where you can't see them.

JH: I feel like I have almost done that. Like, just in that last second, like seen that flash of something moving and then stopped again, and seen someone come into my view.

PC: Oh, yeah, I've spent a lot of time driving on this campus, and I have had it happen to me. I remember distinctly one specific incident and there was a lady walking, exactly the scenario I described, I was making a left and she was walking. She was perfectly lined up, and the only reason I saw her, it was

in the winter, and she was wearing a scarf, and I saw the scarf flutter out into my vision from behind the pillar, and that's the only way that I saw her. So, that was an important lesson for me.

JH: Yes.

PC: Like, I need, even myself, to take the time to look and make sure that there is not someone hidden where I can't see them.

JH: Right. And, then just confirmed by the data that you were seeing with, you know, what was happening with these accidents around campus.

PC: Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah.

JH: Wow! Well, I think that is great advice. You know, I just know myself walking in, that I am always kind of scanning to sort of see what is going on in the environment and just like being aware and really paying attention to the folks that are trying to guide us safely across these intersections.

PC: Yeah, absolutely. And, to that point that we do have, it's a contracted company, but we do have a medium-sized team, I'll say, of contractors that are out there every morning and every afternoon, especially around the construction sites to help guide traffic, to your point to help pedestrians work through those very busy intersections.

JH: Yes, yes. They do a great job too.

PC: Thank you.

JH: So, kind of building on that, if someone does witness like an accident, whether it be a vehicle versus pedestrian, or just someone kind of tripping over a curb and falling, which is often sometimes things that we see in Occupational Health, what would you say is the best way to assist them in those circumstances?

PC: Yeah, there are several facets to that question. The immediate thing that comes to mind is medical support. So I will say most of your listeners, we'll make an assumption here, but I would say most of your listeners probably know more about medicine than me, or my officers due, so I will leave piece to…

JH: We've got the Medical Center there.

PC: Yes, so I will leave that piece to them. As far as, you know, we can stop bleeding and keep the airways going, but that's about the extent of our expertise on that. So, leaving that piece to the experts there. So, talking about from my perspective, as a police officer, you know I think the two things that would be most immediately helpful would be one, it is kind of an industry term, but scene management, so just helping to the best of your ability to help keep the scene and the victim as calm as we can. And two, and it sounds simple, but I have done this job for a long time, call and report it to the police department. So, it is very frequent that we will find out, whatever it is, could be anything. We are talking about accidents, but after the fact, we will find out, you know, maybe five people saw it, but zero of them called and reported it.

JH: Or maybe jumped in to just calm the person down, or just help, and then they forget. Everybody is so involved in that.

PC: Yep.

JH: So, maybe if you are pressed for time, that could be your thing that you do to help.

PC: Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

JH: Just call and report it.

PC: 100%. You know, I think, its human nature, right. So, we probably all heard this term bystander effect,

JH: Yeah.

PC: So, I think that is in play. But I think specifically when we talk about the Med Center, we have a lot of people that have a lot of knowledge about treating patients. So, I am making another assumption here, but you know, if I am a medical staff member and I see someone that gets hurt, my first thought would be, "I'm going to help that person."

JH: Right

PC: But not necessarily that I should report it.

JH: Right.

PC: So, yeah, just having someone that can actually report that to the police department would really be a huge step.

JH: Well, and there is probably, you know, a lot of folks that are walking that are like, well I'm not a medical person and so, you know, there is tons around here, somebody else is going to help the situation.

PC: Absolutely.

JH: But then, if they do report it, they can feel like they are a part and they have something that they can add to the situation even though they may not be able to tend to them and provide first aid.

PC: 100%. And you know, I would say rather my dispatch center receive 10 duplicate phone calls, than to receive zero.

JH: Yes. Wow. I think that is great. So then, how about, you know, when an employee encounters people walking on campus that could be a threat or have ill intent? Do you have, maybe just some data that could inform us on incidents of physical assault, theft, sexual assault, that may be reported around campus and kind of how often do we see folks that are encountering this sort of situation?

PC: Sure. Yeah. So, when we talk about sexual assault versus theft, that is a pretty big range of impact to the community. So, the good news is that at Vanderbilt, either between the Medical Center and the University, is that when we look at those, I want to use to term more serious offenses, is that we don't see them that often. I can't say they never happen, that would be ideal, but it is not frequent, it is rare. I will take this moment to plug our annual security report that is on our website, and anyone can go and look at that, and they can see all of the different stats, and it is broken down. It includes both the University and the Medical Center.

JH: Excellent.

PC: But, yeah. If you go to, we are about to get a new website, so this address may change if you are listening to this in the future. But, currently today, it is police.vanderbilt.edu.

JH: Perfect.

PC: Yeah. And, so you can look at all those stats. So, back to my point, is when we look at things, the more serious crimes, we don't see them very frequently at Vanderbilt. However, when we look at things like theft or assault, which I will touch on here in just a little more detail in a second, if we ignore the common crimes that we would expect on a college campus, such as under-age drinking, for example. If we set those to the side, by far, the most common issue or crime that we see at Vanderbilt is theft. That's on both sides of the house, University and Medical Center. So, when we think about the #1 crime that we experience at Vanderbilt, it is theft. And, most of those thefts, pretty wide margins of those thefts are what we would call thefts of opportunity. So, it is someone that leaves their wallet sitting out, or their laptop sitting out, and they go to the restroom and come back, and then their item is gone.

JH: Indeed.

PC: In an ideal world, that wouldn't happen. Right. We would prevent that from happening. However, I do think that safety, security, law enforcement is a team effort between the police department and the community. It is very unfortunate, so I'm not justifying it, but even areas in which you may feel like your item may be safe, like a breakroom inside the hospital, we are finding that items are being stolen from those areas, in which they should be safe and you should be allowed to leave your item. So, looking at thefts, and making sure that all of our items are locked up to the best that we can.

JH: Right. Police your belongings.

PC: Yes, yes. That would be very helpful. I want to talk about assaults, because I think that it is a little unique for us. So, one of the things that we do at Vanderbilt is we try very hard to make sure that our stats represent what is actually happening. I'm going to give you an example. So, if you have a patient that maybe they are under anesthesia and as they are coming out of the anesthesia, maybe they assault one of the medical staff members. There was no intent to assault someone.

JH: Right.

PC: But, because of their altered state at that time, you know, something happens, right?

JH: So it fits the definition, but yeah, maybe not what we all think of when we think of crime and assault, but it is something that you have to address.

PC: Exactly. Right. So, we don't want to, for a lack of a better word, we don't want to fudge those statistics and say well we are not going to press charges for that, so we aren't going to count it as an assault, because at the end of the day, the assault still occurred. Even if there was no intent to harm someone, there was still someone that suffered some type of injury.

JH: And it's on campus.

PC: Correct.

JH: So, it goes into those numbers.

PC: Exactly. So, we try very hard to make sure that our statistics accurately represent what happened. We try not to make them, we don't want them to look favorable, we want them to look accurate.

JH: Indeed.

PC: Yeah. And so, that is something that's, it's a, there's a large number of our assaults specifically are those types of scenarios, in which it is a patient in some type of altered mental state that assaults a staff member.

JH: Right.

PC: And, we want to collect that data, accurately report it, so then we can assign resources to try to prevent those from happening in the future.

JH: Alright. And then, in and around campus, as far as assaults, is there any way to kind of tease out some of that data so that people are aware of what is happening just on the street, as opposed to in the hospital facilities themselves?

PC: Yeah. So, some of that will be in the annual security report that I talked about. But one thing is that, you've probably seen these, the security notices that will come out. So, if we have something that is significant, with some type of ongoing threat that the community needs to be aware of to protect themselves, we send those security notices out to both sides. The process is a little different between medical center employees and university community members, students or staff, whatever that looks like. But we want to make sure that information is getting out to the community. So, just like you're talking about, if there was some type of specific assault on the street that has a different set of circumstances to a patient that was in an altered mental state, that is where you may see those security notices coming out to say hey, here's this incident that happened and here are some resources to help protect yourself.

JH: So maybe, like via email or just sometimes I know I see things kind of pop up on the screen, you know as we are working on the computers, and things like that?

PC: Yeah. So, I'm going to diverge for a moment, because I think this is an important topic. So, there's two different tools that we have to alert the community to threats. We have one that is called Alert VU and then we have one that is called Security Notice. It is very confusing, so I'll try to break it down.

JH: OK.

PC: When you mentioned the message popping up on your desktop, that's the Alert VU system.

JH: Ok.

PC: So Alert VU, uses various methods to notify the community. So, desktop alerts are one of them. Phone calls, text messages, emails. If you have the VandySafe App downloaded, it will do a push notification to your phone. Those are for <u>immediate</u> threats to safety. So, something is happening right now, and you as a community member need to take action right now to protect yourself.

JH: Got it.

PC: So, that's Alert VU. Security notices will only come through email. That's the only way that they are delivered. And, those are for ongoing, but not immediate safety concerns. So, it is more of a generalized like, "Hey, we saw a pattern of issues and we want the community to know that this pattern exists so that you can protect yourself moving forward."

JH: So, we have kind of covered some things about theft, and you know physical assault, and sexual assault, just you know ways to be aware of it on campus and just to keep yourself safe. What if you witness someone being assaulted? It's not you, but you see something happen on campus. What might be some steps that you can do to help the victim, or just to be able to identify the assailant.

PC: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, that's a great question. I want to preface this and say that we do not expect people to go and intervene necessarily, call us so we can respond. To the best of your abilities help keep the scene and the victim calm, and then again, report the incident to the police department. Now, I will say I think there is one important piece here, specifically when we talk about if we saw like an assault or something happen. Our campus is very confusing, and it constantly changes. Right. So, something that would be very beneficial for us is when someone calls to report it, is to know where you are on the campus. Because, you may know I'm in, I'm just going to make up a location here, I'm in south garage, but you may not know that you're on the basement level, second level, or first level, whatever. And something that would really help speed up our ability to respond to the scene is to know exactly where you are in whatever building, location, or structure that you are in or near. So, just taking that little bit of extra time to familiarize yourself with the surroundings today, before an incident happens, so that if something were to happen and you had a call in to report any incident, that you know exactly where you are so that we can get officers to you as fast as possible.

JH: Right. Know the names of the structures, even if you've got your trek from garage to campus, and your building, you know, completely down, pay attention to what things you pass along the way, or, know the name of your parking garage. Know that there are different elevators, or whatever that you may take to get to the bottom floor when you get off and then start your journey walking. So, all of those things are important. Just to have those things to report in case that circumstance was to come up. I think that's great. Do you know, can you tell us a little about I-Reports?

PC: Through the VandySafe app?

JH: Yeah.

PC: Ok, yeah. So, uhm, I'll talk a little bit, I'll just talk about VandySafe app a little more broadly, but specifically, the I-Report is a way that you can report any incident, and it even allows you to take photos and videos that can be submitted.

JH: Oh, wow.

PC: Hmm, hmm. Yeah, it's really neat. Right. Because you know, going back to talking about identifying a suspect and what's kind of the best things you could do. Take a photo.

JH: Yah.

PC: Snap a photo and...

JH: I-Reports, bam. There you go.

PC: That makes it very easy.

JH: I know.

PC: So, but I will say for the VandySafe app in general, the I-Report, we can report those things and put attachments on there, it's awesome. But, all of those features, there are various features in that app, they all go back to a human dispatcher that is on our campus. So, it is not AI, there is no, you know, robots or anything, it's all human interactions that are happening on the back-end of that app. So, if you do the virtual walk home in the app, if you do the I-Report, if you do the chat feature, any of those things go to an actual human dispatcher sitting on the edge of our campus over there by the football stadium.

JH: Oh my gosh! That's great to know.

PC: Hmm, hmm.

JH: Especially in this, you know, gradually more and more AI taking over these sort of things...

PC: Yep.

JH: This is going directly to a human. Somebody is aware of what is happening to you if you communicate through the VandySafe app.

PC: Yes.

JH: That's great information. I think they have, like you can do a blue light call on there as well, right?

PC: Correct, yes. There are a lot of features in that app. I very highly recommend it. There are various modalities that you can use to contact us.

JH: Right.

PC: Yeah.

JH: And the blue light call, I guess, it goes straight to a dispatcher.

PC: Correct.

JH: So, you know, if you have the app, you don't have to be at one of those phones, like an emergency phone, you can do that exactly from your app wherever you are standing.

PC: Yep.

JH: And you get to a person. And, it sounds like there's a lot of folks that already trust this app and have used it, and have had success with it, so that just really kind of gives kudos to the app and its ability to help support people in staying safe, which is great.

PC: Yeah, absolutely.

JH: I know that you can do like a virtual walk to your car, or a friend watch too.

PC: Yes.

JH: So, explain a little bit about those types of features.

PC: Yeah, so I think that's, they are really the same feature, just depends on who is on the other end watching. So, you do the friend watch then it's your friend who is watching you walk. If you do the virtual walk home, again, it goes back, there's a real human dispatcher, that's on our campus that is watching your location, tracking your phone and watching you go from point A to point B - whatever that is. And then, it has a feature on there where you can immediately call for assistance if you need something, or if something were to occur halfway through the walk.

JH: Ok.

PC: And it has the ability to also chat with a dispatcher, which again it's a real human that's answering and typing and responding to those texts. I will say, on the topic of the virtual walk home, if you can remember, is to end your walk once you get to your car. Because you are suddenly doing 60 miles an hour down the street, and it raises some questions. So, it's not the end of the world if you don't, but it would be helpful if you would remember to end your walk once you're at your destination.

JH: Yes, definitely. Just so that you don't get a phone call from the folks that are monitoring that walk trying to figure out if everything is okay.

PC: Correct, yeah.

JH: I know, we want to have our resources, but we want to use them wisely.

PC: Yes.

JH: And, certainly free them up for other folks too. Uhm, so great information. Love it. VandySafe app. You can download it on your phone, and then you know, use it at will. I think that kind of rounds out a lot of things about the VandySafe app. Is there anything else that you can think of as far as topics, just

to, that you would like to either reemphasize or just put out there whether it be part of the VandySafe app or just anything as far as VUPD is concerned?

PC: I'm sure there's a lot we could probably talk for a while, but I would like to reiterate my earlier points about making sure that people report incidences to the police department. Now, I know that sounds simple and I'm going to call my wife out here just a little bit, Hi Trisha. She works for neurosurgery at the Medical Center, you know, she'll come home every couple of months or whatever, "Well, how was your day?"
"Oh, we had some crazy situation with a patient or something."
 I'll say, "Well, did you call the police department to let them know?"
 "Well, no we didn't want to be a bother."
"Okay, well I mean you're married to me; you know what I do, you know what my job is, this is what we are paid to do, call us if there is an incident. Call us."
I say that because, so backing up just a little bit, so my Master's degree is in business so I think about things from an economics perspective, and resource allocation perspective. And, as much as I would love to have an infinite budget and you know 700 officers to patrol the campus, we don't. So, the reality is that at some level our resources are limited. Just like everybody else's resources across the institution.

JH: Indeed.

PC: So, the best way for us to allocate our resources is to have the data to know where to allocate the resources.

JH: Where they serve best.

PC: Correct. Yeah. So, even if it feels minor, letting us know about it, report it to us, and then that way we have the data to make our strategic decisions on where we assign resources. And, then even bigger picture, we think about funding and budgets, and what not, it may not help today or next week, but as we have more accurate data of what trends we are seeing on campus, we can also increase our budget over the period of years to increase the resources as necessary. But, if we don't have the reports and we don't have that data, then we can't go back and argue that we need X-Y-Z to be increased or make these decisions to assign resources to these locations.

JH: Yes. So, report what you're seeing on campus, everyone out there, so the folks that are working behind the scenes to support you and keep you safe, can make the decisions they need make to do so, is what I'm hearing there.

PC: Yeah, spot on.

JH: Alright, which is great stuff. I really appreciate you taking the time today.   You know, this is certainly supportive to just the health of all of our employees, which is certainly what we value here in the Occupational Health department, and just talking about campus safety is such an important topic.

JH: I just want to say thanks to everybody out there listening to this podcast and I do want to give a special shoutout to the all VUPD workers and traffic control personnel. I know you folks are out there working tirelessly every day on our campus to support all personnel, patients, and visitors coming to and

from VU and VUMC. It is a gargantuan mission and on behalf of the Occupational Health Department, I just want to thank them for their efforts in the welfare of everyone on campus.

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