

Using Telemedicine to Provide Virtual Care for COVID-19 Patients at Home

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Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic in San Diego, California, the Infectious Diseases Division at the University of California San Diego established a COVID-19 Clinic dedicated solely to managing patients safely in their homes. This strategy was developed in response to:

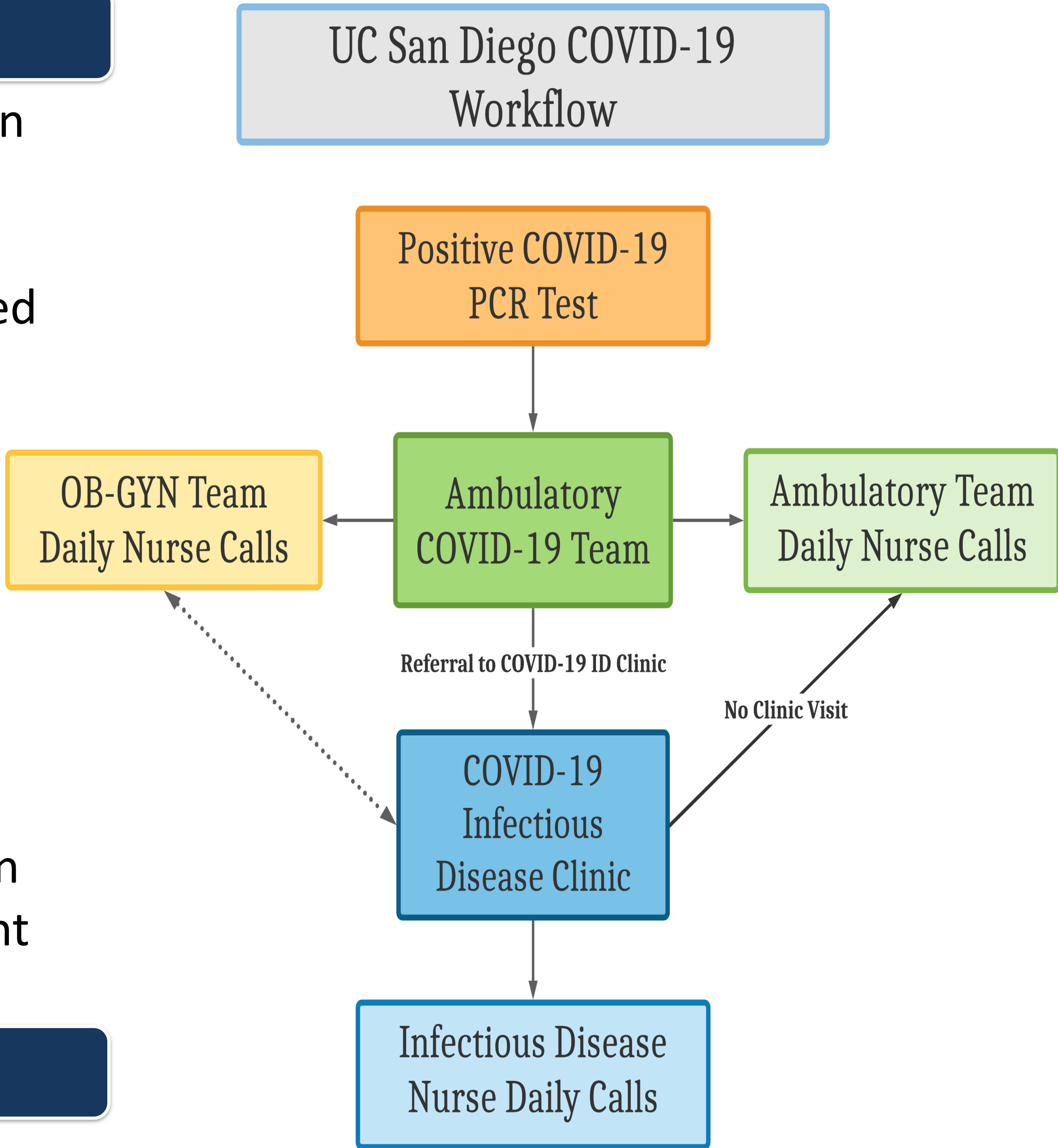
- i) Concerns regarding transmission of infection in the healthcare setting,
- ii) Avoiding overwhelming the healthcare system with COVID-19 patients,
- iii) Providing patients with expedited access to specialists, and iv) reducing the burden on the emergency department and urgent care.

Objectives

To assess the impact of the UCSD COVID-19 Clinic

Methods

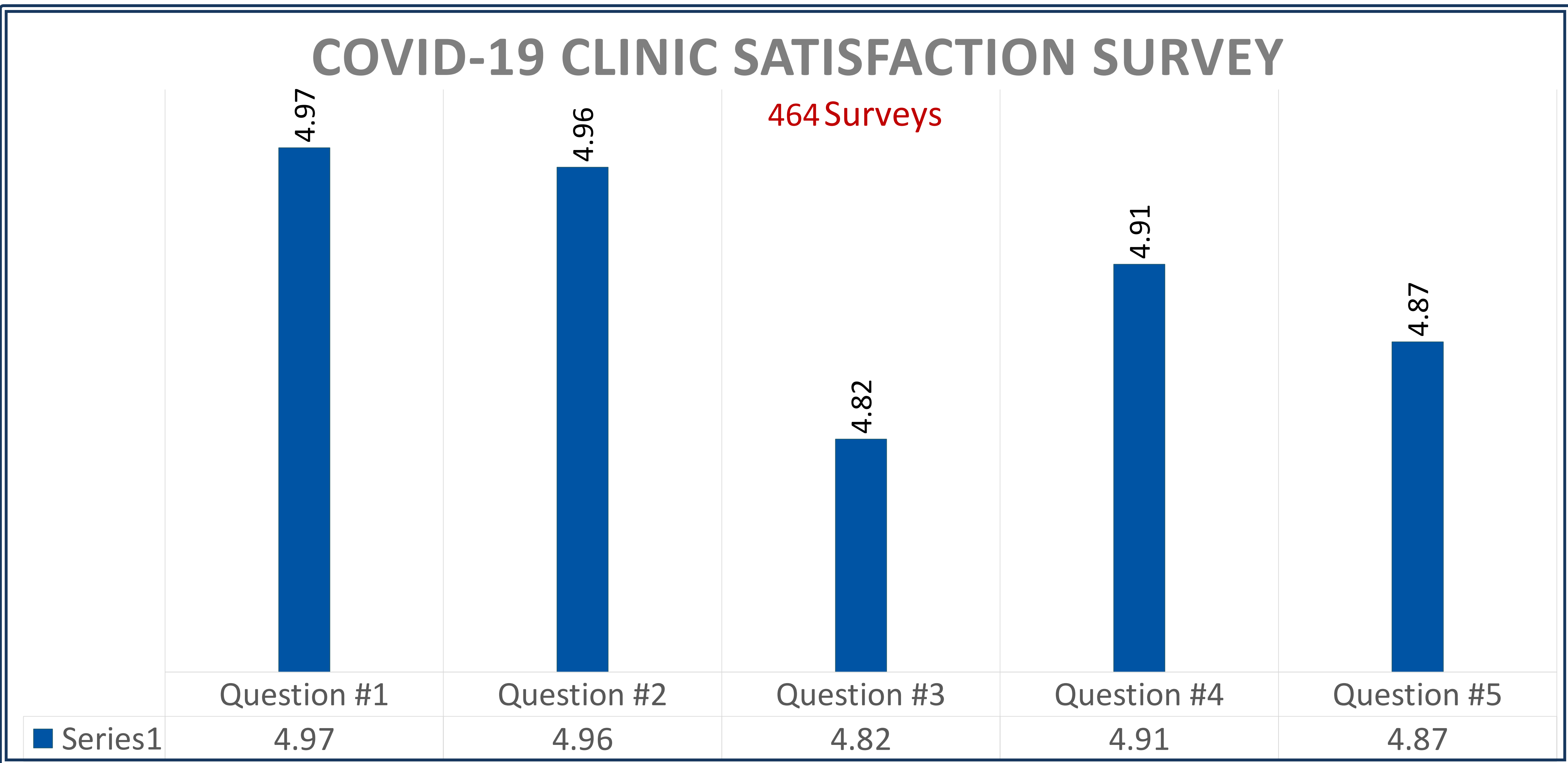
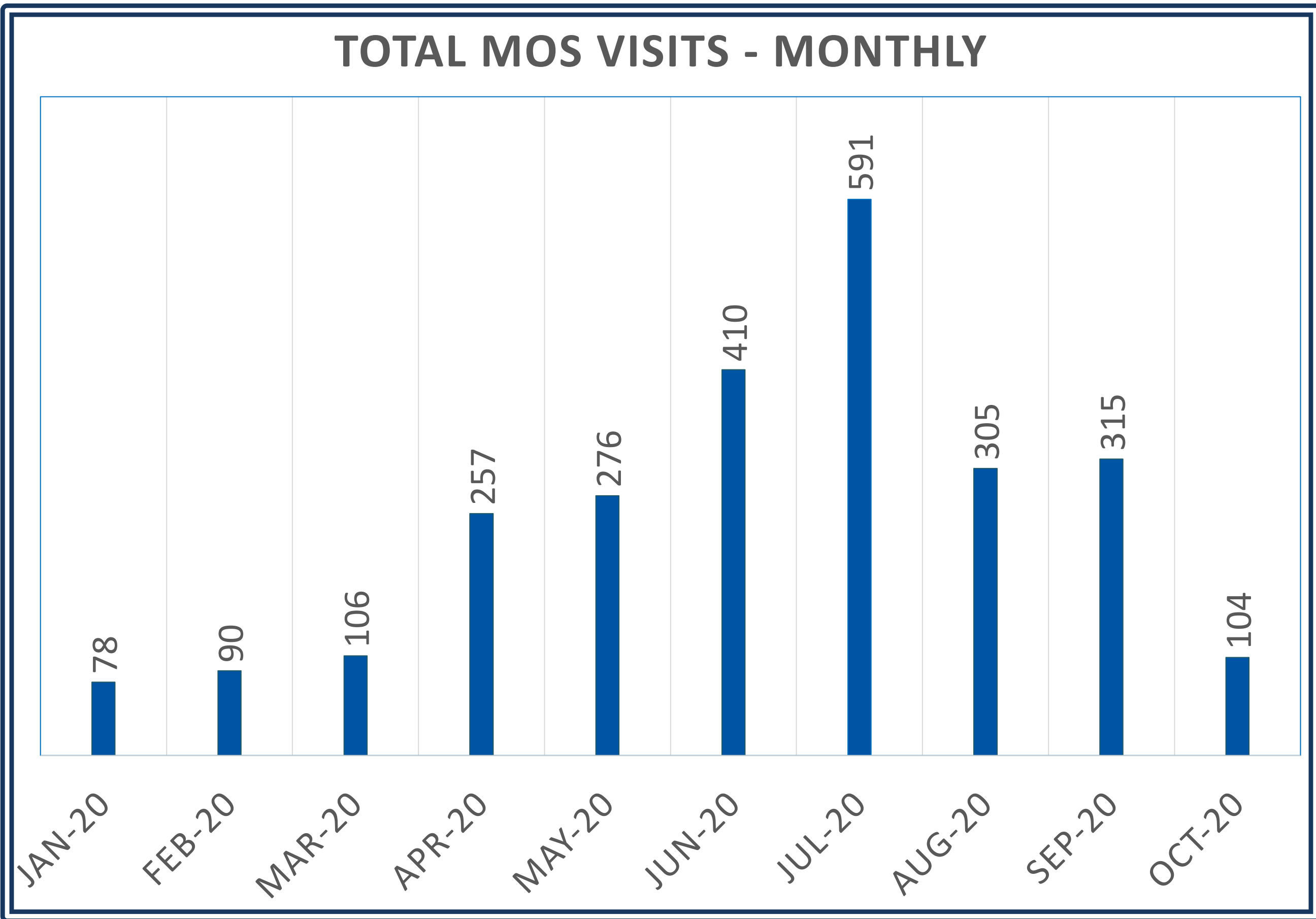
The COVID-19 Clinic staff is comprised of a dedicated nurse, administrative assistant, and four infectious diseases (ID) physicians who aim to see patients within 24 hours of referral via virtual clinics 5 days a week. An ID physician initially assesses each patient in a direct telemedicine visit and answers their questions, assesses disease severity, provides both symptom management and emotional support, and education about self-isolation and transmission-based precautions. The patients are then triaged to daily nursing phone calls and follow up visits as needed.



Total COVID-19 Clinic Visits 2,364*
Total COVID-19 Patients Seen **703**

- Total Number Hospitalized 29 (**4.1%**)
- Total Admitted to ICU 3
- Total Number of Deaths 0

*March 27 to October 9, 2020



COVID-19 Clinic Results

Over a period of 24 weeks (March 27 to October 9 2020), the clinic has seen 703 patients. To assess the impact of the clinic, patients are asked to complete a 5-point verbal patients satisfaction survey after their visit. Of the 464 patients who have completed the survey to date, the vast majority reported high satisfaction with their encounters with the COVID-19 physician, with a mean score of 4.90 or higher on all five questions (on a scale of 1 to 5).

When patients were asked:

1. Did you feel comfortable talking to your COVID-19 ID physician? (mean score 4.97)
2. Did the physician do a good job answering your questions? (mean score 4.96)
3. Understood when to seek care from an emergency room, urgent care or hospital? (mean score 4.82)
4. Felt better educated on how to self-quarantine at home (mean score 4.91)
5. Patients reported feeling safer after talking with their physician (mean score 4.87)

Conclusions

The UCSD COVID-19 Clinic demonstrates how telemedicine can be utilized in response to a public health crisis by creating a virtual clinic to provide ID care for patients in their homes.