Rapid Response to COVID Situation

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On August 30 reports of elevated levels of the COVID-19 virus were found in the wastewater samples from four of USU’s residence halls: Rich, Jones, Morgan, and Davis. The students in these dormitories then had COVID-19 testing at an Intermountain Healthcare Facility.

The following day, Scott Deberard, Director of Utah State Student Health and Wellness Center (SHWC), was able to acquire nine Abott ID Now machines (able to run testing for COVID-19) from the State of Utah. Procedures were rapidly put into place to safely and effectively test students and staff. These machines were housed at the Student Health and Wellness Center and enabled the staff to start testing any contacts of the students from these dorms and also other possible exposures or symptomatic students and staff.

Along with the testing capability, there was also an upper respiratory clinic that was constructed in order to have well patients separate from ill/symptomatic patients. A patient can be tested for COVID-19 and then can be seen immediately afterward by a provider if their symptoms indicate the need. This lowers the risk within the clinic for contagion of illness, but also enables the patient to receive treatment.

Ani Eccles and Sheri Anderson, nurses at USU Student Health and Wellness, were able to test the students that had exposure or had symptoms that might indicate the COVID-19 virus. They were diligent in implementing increased cleaning procedures and learning how to use the Abott ID Now machines, as well as helping with other responsibilities within the clinic.

The other nursing and front desk staff worked tirelessly to fill in the gaps that were made by having reduced staff to run the remainder of the health clinic. Procedures for scheduling, screening symptoms of patients prior to coming to the clinic, and other safety and cleaning procedures have been implemented to permit testing to occur at the clinic.

“Our training was pretty brief and we didn’t have much time to prepare, but after a few days, Sheri Anderson and I felt proficient swabbing patients and running the tests,” Eccles said. “We’ve had a lot of changes at Student Health the past couple months and it has required us to step up as a department so that we can continue to serve the student’s needs during these unprecedented times.”

Health care providers stepped in to call the results to the students as well as conduct phone and telemedicine appointments to ensure that any treatments that are needed or any questions were answered.

Starting Sept. 21, testing for COVID-19 was made available to students on the east side of Maverik Stadium. Utah State University nursing students were able to start running these tests, supervised by their instructors.

Testing for students that are having symptoms of COVID-19 can still be done at the Student Health and Wellness Center. This enables testing to be done prior to being seen in the upper respiratory clinic. This rapid response has helped to self-isolate the students with
COVID-19 as quickly as possible as well as to test those contacts in a time-efficient process.

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