

## This Quarter's Stories

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# How Assist Health Group Navigated COVID-19

Assist Health Group, like countless other businesses across the country, was heavily impacted by COVID-19. During the past few months, our team has overcome a never-ending series of challenges.

## Cancellation of Elective Procedures

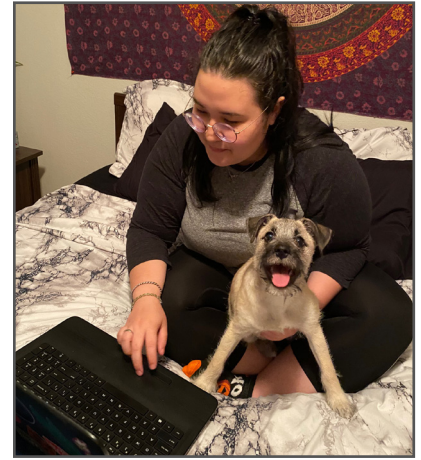
In March, the pandemic began to sweep the nation and brought along rapid changes to healthcare. States halted elective procedures, and our Colonoscopy and Radiology programs were severely interrupted. Appointment requests disappeared and our team was flooded with hundreds of cancellation requests from across the nation. We waived our cancellation policies and our scheduling team devised a plan to work through the flood of requests. But before they could get to work, the next shock hit...

## Shelter in Place Order

Dallas County announced a shelter in place order in March, leaving the team with just one day to move our entire operation to a work from home setting, something never done in the 10 year history of the company. The team met at the office over the weekend to determine a plan. The next week was spent by the team battling IT issues and adjusting work life at home while still keeping up with the flood of cancellation requests.

## Regroup and Restrategize

Now acclimated to work from home, it was time to regroup and restrategize. With providers changing scheduling policies daily, we first needed a clear picture on the status of our network. Alondra and Anahy contacted hundreds of providers in our network to get a status on scheduling and new COVID-19 fields were added to our internal system to record updates. Roxana and Samantha created a waitlist for patients that were affected by closures. Our plan worked, and by mid-April the backlog was behind us. By May, we were already rescheduling cancelled appointments.



Marketing coordinator, Chelsea Moran, working from home



Having fun while working from home!

## Getting Creative at Home

Without access to the office, stuffing envelopes and mailing check payments became a time consuming task. Luckily, our director's 7 and 4 year old were out of school and available to help. With wages paid in ice cream, the children helped fold documents and stuff envelopes each day after lunch.

## The Claims Surge

Meanwhile, our billing team hit a crisis of their own. Providers had additional time to focus on accounts receivables with shut downs in place. Our billing team faced an overwhelming surge of incoming claims unlike anything they had seen before. "It was a time where we and our providers were facing an immense liquidity crisis and our payments could really make a difference by giving providers much needed liquidity" said Director Ali Poonawala.

In mid-March, with the pandemic still unfolding, we made the decision to accelerate outgoing provider payments. Leslie and Anna were instructed to drop other tasks and work through the flood of claims, despite having no access to scanners, printers or the dual screen setup at the office, they managed to process and pay out more claims in April than any other month in the history of the organization.

## Consultations and Testing

As shut downs went into effect, Assist Health Group made it a policy to approve telemedicine consultations when possible. For our RadiologyAssist program, we scaled up our virtual constultation program so that patients could get referrals without the need for a face-to-face doctor visits. A record breaking 330 consultations through the program were scheduled throughout April and May.

As facilities began to reopen, pre-procedure COVID-19 testing become common and the scheduling team rose to the challenge by securing agreements with urgent care clinics and labs to provide easy and affordable testing to our patients.

## Returning to the New Normal

Having overcome the various barriers faced along the way, the team returned back to office in May, happy to see each other. Later in the month, the Dallas Business Journal covered the Assist Health Group with a story on our experience surviving the pandemic. We continue to work around the daily curveballs the pandemic throws at us and look forward to serving our patients and our providers.



Assist Health Group in the Dallas Business Journal



# Our Solution to COVID-19 Testing

During the pandemic, Assist Health Group took initiative to launch our own solution to COVID-19 testing.

## Filling the Need for At-Home Testing

At the inception of the pandemic, we quickly saw a large demand for testing with little access to the offering. Our director constructed a plan to offer testing.

Using our knowledge of at-home colorectal cancer screening testing, we developed our own solution, with the help of our collaborating labs, to screen individuals for COVID-19 from the comfort of their own homes. In a time where leaving home became risky, the need for at-home options for care was at an all-time high.

The kits we offered contained everything required to collect a sample, along with an overnight envelope to return the specimens to a lab for development and could be shipped nationwide. Patients received results from the lab within days without leaving the comfort of their own home.

## The End of Testing for Assist Health Group

We were able to send out 250 screening tests before running out of the swabs required to collect the sample. The testing swabs were at a nationwide shortage and we ran into several barriers attempting to obtain more but were ultimately unsuccessful.

Once the Food and Drug Administration announced that COVID-19 screening tests administered by a medical professional were the preferred method of screening, we decided to discontinue the offering and paused our efforts to gather more swabs. We hope to revisit the ability to send tests out in the future to ensure accessible testing nationwide, but have no current timeline.



Assist Health Group's at-home COVID-19 screening kit

## Catching Up with Our Providers

This quarter, Dr. Aaron Burrows MD of Summit Gastroenterology and Digestive Wellness in Denver, CO gave us some insight into his practice and involvement in the ColonoscopyAssist program.

### When did you first decide to become a doctor? Why?

"I first decided to become a doctor when I was in high school and had several sports related injuries. I was always amazed at how doctors could just get you up and running again so quickly! In college, I liked science classes the most and it seemed like an obvious route with my passions and life."

### Why did you choose to specialize in gastroenterology? How long have you been practicing?

"I've been in practice for 14 years, which does not include an additional eight years of residency and fellowship. Total, I've been in internal medicine and gastroenterology for 22 years! I decided to become a gastroenterologist when, during medical school, I developed significant symptoms of ulcerative colitis. At age 22 I had to go for a colonoscopy and realized that I would have a unique perspective with my patients dealing with similar diseases and issues."

### Can you share a little about your practice and team?

"My practice is located in Denver, CO and have 2 front office people that have been with me for a long time. I also have a dietician as a part of my practice, which is a rarity in the world of gastroenterology. I made the decision to hire on a dietician when I realized most patients in my neighborhood could not afford to see one. We also have a nurse practitioner to help with patient care during busy times or if I'm away from the practice."

### How long have you collaborated with ColonoscopyAssist and what made you want to participate?

"I began participating in the program well over a decade ago. I thought it would be a great opportunity to be able to provide colonoscopies and GI care to patients who otherwise may not be able to afford it with high deductibles or being uninsured. Nobody should have to forgo an important and possibly life-saving procedure!"

### Any words to our readers on the fence about getting screened?

"It's not that bad! At our practice, we use the lowest volume prep to clean out the colon, which makes the prep for the procedure much more palatable and easy. Patients who have had colonoscopies uniformly say the procedure is painless and easy and would do it again. Screening colonoscopies are the only cancer screening test that prevent cancers from developing, rather than solely detecting the cancer. Colonoscopies would be better called a 'cancer prevention' than a screening test!"



Dr. Aaron Burrows of Summit Gastroenterology and Digestive Wellness