COSSMA is a FQHC in Puerto Rico serving the Central- East area. We have 7 clinics and a staff of over 40 providers and specialist. A lockdown was ordered in March by the Government of Puerto Rico establishing many restrictions on service and enforcing people to stay at home. All our appointments for follow up visits had to be postponed and the leadership quickly had to established a new way to deliver care to our communities. Strategically we first targeted the immediate problem of how to provide continuity of care despite the risks brought by the COVID-19 Pandemic. We reviewed previous course of actions implemented during other emergencies in which we learned that we will have to adapt and to be attentive of what are the priorities for our patients at the time. Lesson learned previously during hurricane María: for our patients, it will not be preventive primary care nor thinking about taking care of their chronic conditions.

Also this emergency was different, new, unknown. Therefore new methods to deliver care and preventing complications of chronic conditions had to be created. Beside this was our other goal of assisting in the provision of care of patients that were not critically ill ( We have no ER services). There was a major concern in the island that the hospitals and ER will not be able to care for all the patients.

What COSSMA did?

We kept our clinics open for service but with a different approach. First we created an Express Triage in which our clinical staff was able to screen patients for acute respiratory symptoms. This service was established outside the clinics in tents. New Policy for Standing orders for laboratory tests to screen for COVID-19 was created and implemented and a new Policy to provide remote services was also created and implemented. Before this, there was no method of Telemedicine available in COSSMA. The Government provided a waiver for all physicians to be able to provide care either by telephone or video consults. The great majority of our patients does not have the means for video consults. We trained our Clinical staff in providing continuity of care by this method, also in the Policy of managing PHI and providing remote services. We managed to assign duties to the majority of our employees to ease the concern about unemployment due to the decrease in patients face to face encounters. Many phone calls for follow up in medication management and refills were needed to ensure the patients our pharmacies were open. We expanded our medication delivery services. A call center was created for special services: one phone line was assigned for OB patients with direct access to our Midwife to ensure proper follow up to prenatal care. Another line was dedicated for Mental Health services, with direct line to one of ours Clinical Social Workers, trained to assist in mental health crisis. Our Tele-consult line for adults and pediatrics was available also during working hours and consults were made by our physicians as if the patient was going to be seen as a walk-in patient. MAT services were also provided by teleconsults as well as Psychology and Psychiatrists services.

COSSMA was able to established collaborations with Puerto Rico’s Health Department through the Primary Care Association and received COVID-19 serologic rapid test to be used in our laboratories ( available in 2 sites), also in collaboration with Direct Relief we have been assisting in screening with laboratory test for COVID-19 to patients in Home-care facilities.

Face to face encounters continued with strict protocols of infection control and this has help in the way that the patient that comes for any other concern that could not be managed by “ TeleSalud” has mentioned to us that feels “ safe” in visiting the clinics. ( COSSMA established a screening protocol to received patients for face to face encounters, including a preclinic done by nursing personnel, a questionnaire to asses COVID-19 symptoms and or exposure, etc).

PPE has been a challenge, but our department of providing supplies has established a process of communication with the clinics to ensure availability.

Patient/employee experience is important to us and help us determine our ways of delivery of services.