Implementation of a COVID-19 Musculoskeletal Clinic Triage to Improve the Number of Pilot Training Flights

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INTRODUCTION

- MSK pain is a considerable impact for military pilots (1)
- Physical therapy (PT) and osteopathic manipulation (OMT) are frequently used modalities for pain control in the pilot population
- Pilot training is a top priority due to a shortage of pilots (2)
- During the COVID-19 pandemic pilot training was declared mission essential
- Flight surgeon duties were shifted to managing COVID response and removed from clinic

GOAL: Preserve pilot training by treating pain while allowing physicians to fulfill COVID duties

METHODS

- Encourage direct access PT with triage abilities
- 1. Patients on flying status
- 2. Post-operative patients
- 3. Acute duty limiting pain
- Nurse triage in flight medicine clinic push to PT vs physician evaluation for medication management
- Follow up visits by telemedicine as available
- Comparison of means and simple statistical significance calculated (3)

RESULTS

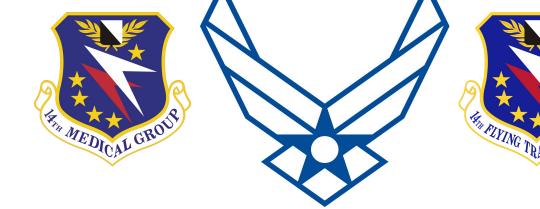
	PT Clinic	FM Clinic	# Flights ^	People DNIF *^
Mar 23, 2020 – Jun 23, 2020	166	60 (10% virtual)	10,473	188
Dec 23, 2019 – Mar 22, 2020	224	118	9,711	368
P-Value	< 0.01	< 0.001	0.5712	0.0014

COVID duties fulfilled and other clinical needs met

DISCUSSION

- Training flights were not impacted by scheduling change
- Clinic access was able to meet demands
- Physicians able to do COVID assignments
- Multiple limitations exist

MSK pain triage with a focus on duty limiting pain allowed physicians to fulfill COVID duties while preserving the flying mission





- Many variables contributing to number of flights including weather and maintenance
- DNIF rate not isolated to MSK pain only
- Physical fitness testing paused due to pandemic
 - Decrease in overuse injuries
 - Decrease in appointments for text exception evaluations
- ^ Flights and DNIF tracked by month comparing Jan – Mar with Apr - Jun

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Continue emphasis on direct access PT
- Able to use this model with decreased staff related to deployments and moves

CLINIC SET UP

- Flight medicine 3 physicians (flight surgeon) and 1 PA
- PT clinic with 1 DPT and 2 technicians
- COVID duties include outside screening and testing and a COVID med director

ACYONYMS

MSK – Musculoskeletal

FM – flight medicine

PT – physical therapy

OMT – osteopathic manipulation

*DNIF – duties not including flying (grounded from flying)

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