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## **Harris Health's 'Ask My Nurse' Answers the Call during COVID-19 Pandemic**

**HOUSTON (May 18, 2020)**—In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to keep people away from healthcare facilities unless truly necessary, Harris Health System has temporarily expanded its Ask My Nurse telephone help line. In its two months of expansion, the help line has already received nearly 60,000 calls—roughly 253% more than a usual month of calls.

Ask My Nurse provides callers expert health advice from registered nurses. Since the city and county's stay-home, facemask and social distance recommendations, the service has helped callers with COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 health concerns. The service is now available 24/7 and completely free to the public.

“During this frightening and confusing time, our community has questions. They want to know if they are sick enough to see a physician, if they should stay home, where they can get tested, and how to avoid becoming infected with the virus,” says Tandiwe Kone, telephone triage nurse, Ask Your Nurse, Harris Health. “It’s important for us to be here to answer the call because answering a patient’s cry for help is what nursing is all about. There is no way we would be able to fulfill the Harris Health mission without being here when they need us the most.”

Typically, Ask My Nurse is a service provided only to Harris Health patients who want to discuss medical issues and obtain care recommendations. As the coronavirus outbreak worsened, the service also began taking transferred calls from the Harris County Public Health Department from people with non-testing related questions about COVID-19.

“Ask My Nurse has been assisted by nurses from across our system to keep up with the increased call volume,” says Adrienne Mendoza, administrative director, Patient Services, Harris Health. “It’s been a wonderful group effort and a great example of many areas of Harris Health coming together for the community during this crisis.”

Nurses from Ask My Nurse use an established and approved telephone triage criteria to address the symptoms given by patients and provide them with specific care instructions. All calls are initially received by Operator Services and prioritized based on the level of severity of the symptoms or request. On average, each nurse responds to 30-40 calls a day.

“Many callers don’t know if their symptoms require in-person medical attention,” Mendoza, says. “There is a wide span of recommendations that Ask My Nurse may provide depending on the seriousness of the call. The outcomes of a call could range from recommending self-care to contacting 9-1-1 during an emergency situation. The Ask My Nurse line provides a level of security and convenience for our community.”

During this particular crisis, Ask My Nurse has played a critical role in supporting our community with necessary assessment and recommendations to minimize the physical exposure of patients going to a clinic/health center or a hospital emergency center.

“The enthusiasm and dedication of the nurses in Ask My Nurse, those nurses from across the system as well as Operator Services agents who have also supported the program, has been vital and very much appreciated,” Mendoza says. “I hope to see the program grow even more in the future.”

To contact Ask My Nurse, call 713-634-1110.

**Photos Attached:** (Courtesy of Harris Health System)  
Adrienne Mendoza

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*[Harris Health System](#) celebrates more than 54 years of championing better health for patients, their families and the community, connecting them to high-quality healthcare services with a focus on primary care, wellness and prevention through its network of 48 clinics, health centers, specialty locations and hospitals. Harris Health is a proud recipient of the prestigious National Committee for Quality Assurance designation for its patient-centered medical homes. Harris Health is staffed by nationally recognized physician faculty and residents from its medical school partners: Baylor College of Medicine; McGovern Medical School at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth); and The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.*