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Capturing Client Feedback for the Reopening of a Medical Fitness Facility During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Medical fitness facilities provide professional exercise and wellness expertise and programming for clinical patients and those with multiple health risks. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the immediate closure of these facilities for the safety of their vulnerable clients. However, data characterizing clients' preferences and concerns of reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic are lacking. **PURPOSE:** Feedback, including preferences and concerns, regarding reopening was captured from clients of a teaching medical fitness facility with the goal of informing reopening practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. **METHODS:** Clients of a medical fitness facility were invited to complete a COVID feedback survey. These data were retrospectively reviewed as a mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) study. **RESULTS:** Of 166 clients, 104 (63%) completed the survey. Almost all clients (96%) considered exercise to be important to them during the pandemic, citing benefits for physical and mental health and to avoid being sedentary. Physical activity levels decreased during the pandemic in 79% of participants due in part to COVID limitations, facility closures, and lack of motivation. Most (65%) were concerned about contracting COVID-19 while exercising in a facility and 38% were hesitant to exercise with student interns due to the spread of COVID-19 on campus. More than half (58%) wanted to exercise with a mask on in a fitness facility that strictly followed CDC guidelines to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The main policies that would make them feel safer upon return were cleaning procedures (30%), reduced people in the facility (26%), and mask requirements (26%), with many adding vaccinations and individual appointment times. During the 3-phase reopening plan 45% (74 of 166) of clients returned for 125 one-on-one appointments by January 2021 with a 336% increase (542 appointments) by August 2021. **CONCLUSION:** Incorporating client feedback, along with ACSM recommendations, supported the reopening of a medical fitness facility and reintroduction of exercise training for clinical populations. Data presented in this study may provide practitioners valuable information on reopening similar facilities.