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**SAN FRANCISCO'S ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE PROGRAM
HELPS CONTAIN COVID-19 AND PRESERVE HOSPITAL
CAPACITY**

*New study shows program could be a model for other cities in containing the spread
of disease*

San Francisco, CA – A study of the isolation and quarantine hotel program that San Francisco launched early in the COVID-19 pandemic shows it successfully retained more than 80 percent of patients, helping contain the spread of the virus, and preserved hospital capacity for those who were sickest with COVID-19.

The comprehensive evaluation of the isolation and quarantine (I/Q) program components and outcomes, believed to be the largest study of its kind nationwide, was published March 2, 2021 in the medical journal [JAMA Network Open](#).

“San Francisco’s ambitious hotel program really led the way in California by helping thousands of vulnerable residents shelter in place, isolate and quarantine to protect themselves and their community from the spread of the virus,” said San Francisco Mayor London N. Breed. “This study has shown how effective the I/Q hotel program has been in keeping the pressure off our hospitals, which helped our frontline medical staff focus on those who were truly sick and in need of care. I’m proud of all the City staff and non-profit workers who worked quickly to get these hotels up and staffed quickly in the early weeks of this pandemic.”

On March 19, 2020, two days after the Bay Area’s historic shelter-in-place order took effect, the San Francisco Department of Public Health (DPH) admitted its first patient to the I/Q hotel program that would grow to include several hotels and serve more than 3,300 people in its first year. The program was created to provide a safe place – for anyone in San Francisco, but particularly for people experiencing homelessness – to isolate if they tested positive for COVID-19 or to quarantine if they were exposed to the virus.

“There are structural issues that make it difficult, if not impossible, for people with COVID-19 who are experiencing homelessness or living in crowded conditions to self-isolate,” said Jonathan Fuchs, MD, MPH, Director of the Center for Learning & Innovation at DPH and first author of the paper. “We realized during the first weeks of the pandemic that we needed to bring together

multidisciplinary teams of nurses and behavioral health specialists to create safe and welcoming spaces for San Franciscans with mild to moderate symptoms, or who were recently exposed to the virus, so they could get the extra support they needed to protect themselves and others and to accomplish that outside the hospital setting.”

The cohort study of 1,009 I/Q patients found that more than 80 percent completed their recommended length of stay. A team of nurses and health workers, supervised by physicians, provides I/Q guests with around-the-clock support including symptom monitoring and wellness checks, three meals a day, and harm reduction services and medication. Guests also may bring their pets and store their belongings during their temporary I/Q stays.

The study also found that just 13 (4 percent) of the 346 I/Q patients who were referred into the hotel program from the county hospital had to return to the hospital as their COVID-19 illness progressed. Direct transfers to the I/Q program from outpatient and emergency departments helped avoid many hospital admissions, maintaining hospital capacity for the patients who needed it the most.

“We knew that excess mortality from COVID-19 occurs when hospital capacity is overwhelmed, and also that some patients might not be able to isolate due to homelessness or crowded living conditions,” said Hemal Kanzaria, MD, MSc, Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine at University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) and senior author of the paper. “The San Francisco I/Q hotel program helped meet a critical need to preserve hospital beds for the sickest patients, while also offering a safe option for patients with mild to moderate illness to isolate.”

The I/Q hotel program is a subset of San Francisco’s [alternative shelter program](#), a quickly mobilized emergency response that has served more than 9,600 people in I/Q, shelter-in-place hotels, shelters, and safe sleeping sites since March 2020.

DPH is just one of many City agencies involved in the local COVID Command Center. The Human Services Agency has managed the properties and provided more shelter-in-place hotel rooms per capita than any county in California. The Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing has ensured that patients discharged from isolation and quarantine are offered a safe place to stay and a path from shelter to housing. Community-based organizations have been invaluable in referring patients to I/Q sites and – for those who could safely isolate or quarantine at home – in supporting them with food, cleaning supplies and other resources.

Fuchs and Kanzaria were joined in the study by authors from DPH, the Departments of Medicine and Emergency Medicine at UCSF, the Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative at UCSF, and the Division of HIV, Infectious Diseases and Global Medicine at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital.

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