

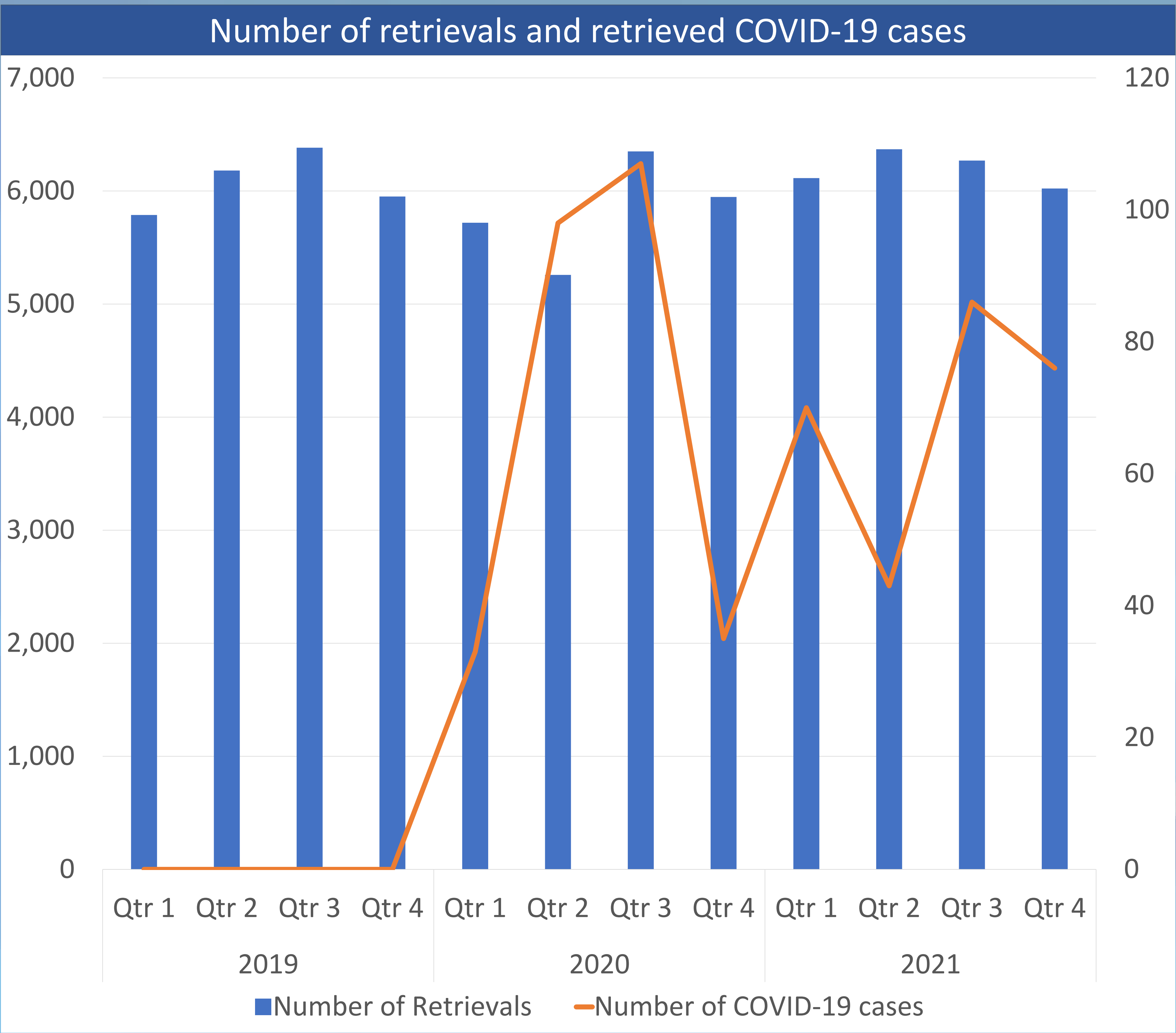
# Evaluating the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Queensland's aeromedical retrieval network

**Dr Clinton Gibbs**, Retrieval Services Queensland  
**Dr Jahnavi Burnham**, Retrieval Services Queensland  
**Dr Shahera Banu**, Retrieval Services Queensland, JTI, QUT



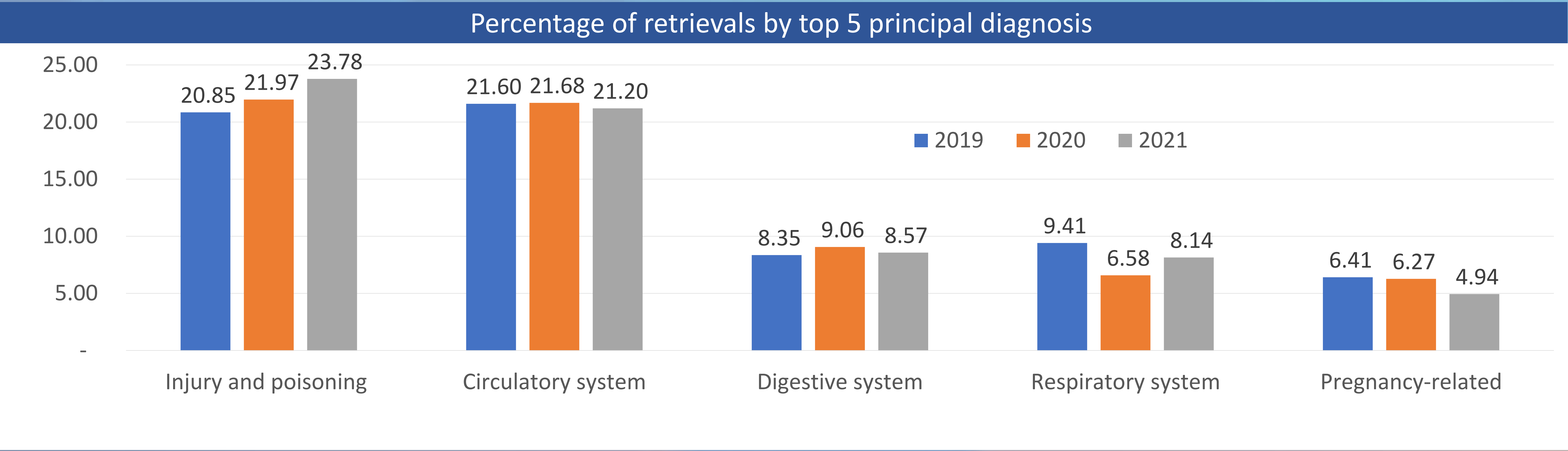
**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to examine the trends of Queensland’s aeromedical retrieval service network usage during the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to pre-pandemic period, in terms of changes to patient characteristics, patient flows, and outcomes including the burden of COVID-19 cases and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) usage.

**Methods:** A retrospective examination of routinely collected data as well as an online survey were conducted to explore the experiences and opinions of Queensland aeromedical retrieval network’s frontline staff to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their ability to perform daily and pandemic related business. Data on patients transferred through Retrieval Services Queensland were extracted from its database between 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2021 were collected.



**Results:** The annual number of retrievals in Queensland were decreased by 2% (N=1,029) during COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 compared to pre-pandemic (2019) and post-pandemic year (2021), equating to 2.8 tasks/day. The number of retrievals were lowest (N=5,258) in April-June quarter, 2020 when Queensland went in lockdown due to the surge in COVID-19 cases. Injury and poisoning became as the most common reason for retrievals during the pandemic years. A trend to increased Primary responses compared to interfacility transfers occurred, with a decrease in referrals from the Cape York Peninsula.

In total, 109 frontline staff consisting of nursing and medical coordinators, emergency medical dispatchers, pilots, aircrew and flight clinical staff participated in the survey. Survey participants highlighted that the PPE usage caused fatigue, sweating, and overheating especially during the warmer months. Fogging of the aircraft added additional complexity to retrieval tasks.



**Conclusion:** A small reduction in activity was noted during 2020, correlating to lockdown periods. This was most prominent in the most remote areas. A trend to increased injury/poisoning and primary responses was noted, likely reflecting changes in population activities through to 2021.