



INSIGHTS

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP, ARTICLES, CASE STUDIES & MORE

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WORKERS ARE STILL FEELING THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19:

THERE'S A NEW PROGRAM TO HELP!

In early September (2020), the United States surpassed 6 million^[i] cases of COVID-19 reported to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Since March, the U.S. has witnessed the diagnosis exponentially increase around the country, some diagnosis resulting in death (approximately 200,000 nationwide^[ii]), yet the vast majority of those diagnosed (nearly 97%) recover. Within the population of those who recover the effects of the virus on their body ranges from asymptomatic to a wide variety of lingering ailments. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, in their 'Science' journal report "Ongoing problems include fatigue, a racing heartbeat, shortness of breath, achy joints, foggy thinking, a persistent loss of sense of smell, and damage to the heart, lungs, kidneys, and brain."^[iii]

So, what's next for those who return to work? In this **INSIGHT** article, we partner with Physical Therapist Nicole McManus, MSPT, OMT, FAAOMPT of Professional Physical Therapy

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS

- POST COVID-19 IMPACTS
- PULMONARY RECONDITIONING TO SUPPORT RECOVERED WORKERS

(ProPT), a provider of outpatient therapy services with a passion and dedicated program for injured workers to examine the impact of reconditioning after being diagnosed with COVID. ProPT recently added a Post-COVID Reconditioning Program to their service line which is focused on systematically preparing the worker to tolerate the demands of their job.

Post-COVID effects include limited cardiovascular endurance, muscle weakness, low VO₂ max (respiratory capacity) and in some cases, cognitive processing deficits and depression as a result of post-intensive care syndrome (PICS). If a worker needs to be able to perform physically demanding tasks over the course of a normal work day there is a strong possibility that, without reconditioning, the worker will fail to meet the job requirements and may need to remain on restrictions.

Professional Physical Therapy uses a validated pulmonary conditioning protocol to address the adverse effects of COVID-19. The worker is evaluated by a licensed physical therapist who not only assesses the impairments and functional deficits present but takes specific

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measurements regarding their pulmonary and cardiovascular function. These key measurements are reassessed regularly to monitor progress and to compare their current abilities to the job requirements. The benefit of a specific reconditioning program for the affected worker is that they can also see and feel their progress. Injured workers who participate in this program have less anxiety or reservation when it is time to return to work as reconditioning allows them to practice their job tasks while consistently increasing their cardio-pulmonary endurance and capacity. Fear avoidance is eradicated when it's time to return to work post-COVID as the workers physical limits have been tested under supervision and monitoring by their ProPT physical therapist.

Consider two health care professionals, or essential workers, who contracted COVID-19 while working in a skilled nursing facility (SNF). The first worker did not require hospitalization for their symptoms and seemingly recovered from the virus. The second worker was hospitalized and ventilated, and remained in the hospital for over a month.

The first worker has since returned to work but has taken sick days several times from not feeling well. She feels exhausted

by mid shift, has mild shortness of breath (SOB) when walking quickly throughout the corridors and finds she needs a recovery day before the end of the week. She thinks she is just terribly out of shape or perhaps she catastrophizes and thinks her health is compromised- maybe she has cancer.

What she does not know is that her symptoms of fatigue, shortness of breath and lower tolerance for sustained activity are typical latent effects of COVID-19. Professional PT's Post-COVID Reconditioning program is all she needs to fully recover from the virus and remain a productive worker at the SNF.

The second worker has been out of work since contracting the virus. He is suffering from post-intensive care syndrome (PICS) as well as the damaging effects of COVID-19 and ventilation. According to the Society of Critical Care Medicine, Post-intensive care syndrome, or PICS, is made up of health problems that remain after critical illness. They are present when the patient is in the ICU and may persist after the patient returns home. Problems can involve the patient's body, thoughts, feelings, or mind and may show up as an easily noticed drawn-out muscle weakness, known as ICU-acquired weakness; as problems with thinking and judgment, called cognitive (brain) dysfunction; and as other mental health problems.^[iv]

The second worker's memory is compromised, he has signs of depression and his cardio-pulmonary capacity for everyday tasks is severely compromised. Pulmonary rehab during the height of the pandemic was not available upon being discharged from the hospital. He has been sedentary at home and has only been followed by his PCP and pulmonologist via telemedicine. He is not sure he will be able

to RTW at the SNF or anywhere for that matter.

What he does not know is that he likely needs supervised and monitored Phase II pulmonary rehabilitation. Once completed, his cardio-pulmonary capacity will greatly improve. There will still be deficits such as functional weakness, lack of flexibility, poor balance/proprioception and low confidence/anxiety that will continue to make him fearful of RTW at the SNF. This is where ProPT's Post-COVID Reconditioning Program comes in.

Physical Therapists address all orthopedic impairments, instill confidence in the patient by methodically implementing functional job simulation activity and progressing their pulmonary capacity while monitoring vitals and assessing maximum oxygen uptake (VO2 max) along the way. The worker's self-efficacy improves because independence and self-monitoring of exertion levels are taught and promoted during the program. By the end of Professional PT's Post-COVID Reconditioning Program, both workers will have the capacity to perform their job, the confidence to RTW and the independence to monitor any residual symptoms along the way.

Learn more about the positive impacts of Post-COVID Reconditioning including how to identify latent effects of COVID-19, examples of COVID reconditioning programming, and proactive strategies for improving return to work success by attending the **"Supporting workers through Post-Coronavirus (COVID-19) Recovery" webinar, Wednesday, November 18, 2020, 1:00 pm ET.**

Learn more about this event and **REGISTER HERE.**

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Nicole graduated cum laude from Northeastern University in 2006 with her Master's Degree in Physical Therapy. She continued her education through two years of orthopedic manual therapy residency and fellowship training at the Institute of Orthopaedic Manual Therapy (IOMT) in 2007 and 2009 respectively. Nicole started her career in a small private practice in MA as a student in 2002, then got licensed in 2006 and continued with the organization as a staff therapist in what eventually became ProEx PT. During her years in ProEx PT, she served as a staff therapist, Worker's Compensation Coordinator, Clinic Director, mentor and TA, Assistant Director of Education and Clinical Education Coordinator (CCCE). She coordinated training through WorkWell Systems, Inc. for the company to improve case management and cost containment through systematic programming like work conditioning and FCEs. The company was acquired by Professional PT in 2017 and Nicole continues to work both in the clinic as a Regional Director of Operations for Boston/Woburn and proudly as part of the Clinical Excellence Department as a Regional Director for New England as well. She continually strives to improve her own practice as well as the education and training of all new clinical staff in the New England region of ProPT. Her most recent endeavor is the promotion and training of medical fitness and lifestyle wellness management. Nicole continues to train and manage worker's compensation programming in ProPT, ensuring that clinicians understand the importance of effective and efficient rehabilitation for injured workers as well as prevention through worker wellness programs. Nicole maintains active APTA and AAOMPT professional memberships and has been recognized as a leader in clinical education by PT schools from around the country. In summary, Nicole's experience combined with her passion for helping her fellow clinicians and future colleagues become more refined, skilled and effective in patient care, help drive Professional PT's mission of Challenging Limits to Transform Lives.