

National Physical Therapy Month: Recognizing Physical Therapists & their Role in Improving the Lives of Those with Long COVID Conditions

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October is filled with the landscape of beautiful foliage, settling back into school routines, and the trick-or-treating of Halloween...it is also National Physical Therapy (PT) Month. This is the perfect time to spotlight and celebrate the value of Physical Therapists (PTs) and their multitude of contributions to the PT profession that are paramount to healthcare and the rehabilitative process of helping people reach their goals.

460 BC

Hippocrates is credited with the first documented physical therapy “treatment” in 460 BC when he introduced the idea of manual manipulation for pain relief. Around the same time, the ancient Greeks, Romans, Chinese, and Egyptians practiced water treatments, exercise, movement, and massage for illnesses.



1800s

In the 1800s, early PTs or “**physiotherapists**” in Europe received the first permissions to perform massage, manipulation, and exercise to help people overcome illness.

1913-20

The **first PT schools** were established in New Zealand in 1913 and in Oregon in 1914. In World War I, PTs performed “rehabilitation therapy” to cure people injured by the war, and the 1920 polio outbreak in the US further secured the future of Physical Therapists.



1920-21

Mary McMillan, known as the “Mother of PT” (due to her contribution to reconstruction aide services), founded the American Women’s Physical Therapeutic Association in 1921, which later changed its name to the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA).

**1939-2019**

World War II facilitated the **transition of PTs** from the hospital setting to care for injured soldiers returning to their homes and communities. Over the last 75 years, PTs have expanded their expertise to include neurological, musculoskeletal, integumentary, and cardiopulmonary. Their expertise in rehabilitative care reaches people of all ages from birth to the end of life.

**2020**

In 2020, a curveball struck and sent the world’s health care system in a downward spiral with the **COVID pandemic**. This health care crisis was unlike anything seen since the Spanish Flu in 1918. COVID forever changed the way people lived and interacted with each other, worked, and communicated. Every aspect of life was affected. Amongst fear of the unknown and anxiety of the virus, PTs were on the front lines implementing their expertise to those they encountered. Their bravery and resilience prevailed in all areas of the healthcare continuum.

Almost three years later, COVID is still rearing its ugly self for the twenty-four million adults in the US that are suffering from the long-term persistent effects of COVID, known as “long-haulers” or Long COVID.

According to the CDC, more than 80% of those with Long COVID are experiencing trouble conducting daily activities. In July of 2021, Long COVID was considered a disability by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This data is validation Physical Therapists have never been more needed in the healthcare community and in the treatment of rehabilitative measures.



Out of the fifty symptoms related to Long COVID, the most common include prolonged debilitating fatigue, muscle, joint, and low back pain, extreme shortness of breath, rapid heart rate with exertion, “brain fog,” headache, insomnia, chest pain/pressure, ongoing GI issues, and loss of taste and smell. These prolonged effects can be debilitating, impacting function, including the overall quality of life.

Preferred Therapy Solutions’ Physical Therapists were quick to analyze patients, patterns, and their persistent health care conditions relating to COVID. This analysis led to the implementation of the PTS Long COVID Recovery Program, which empowers those experiencing Long COVID to take back control of their lives. PTs perform a holistic evaluation assessing areas of dysfunction impacting an individual’s quality of life and then develop a customized person-centered treatment plan to address symptoms, optimize functional outcomes, and incorporate personal goals.



Evidence-based Long COVID Recovery Program treatment resources utilized to manage clinical concerns include:

- Activity Tolerance Guidelines
- Interpreting Vital Signs
- COVID-19 Breathing Patterns and Exercises
- COVID-19 Pulmonary, Cardiac, Musculoskeletal, Neurologic Considerations
- General Guidelines for Treatment of COVID-19: exercise prescription, pain reduction, balance training, and fall risk assessment/reduction
- Observational Warning Signs of Hypoxia
- Energy Conservation Techniques
- Self-monitoring Techniques
- Psychosocial interventions for patients and caregivers:
 - Long COVID support groups
 - Symptom validation
 - Facilitate support systems to address depression/anxiety, reduce caregiver burnout
 - Establish caregiver/patient’s specific goals

“
Let your
hopes, not
your hurts,
shape
your
future.”

Robert H. Schuller

The most fragile patient population, the long-term care resident, has been severely impacted by Long COVID. Gait disturbances, muscular weakness, chronic pain, poor activity tolerance, and balance deficits are areas of dysfunction caused by Long COVID. Combined with a multitude of comorbidities this population already faces, they are now at further risk for falls, continued functional decline, and inferior quality of life. An interdisciplinary Resident Rounds Program provides effective methods in facilitating a holistic audit of the resident's status. Through resident and staff interviews, medical records, and care plan reviews, Long COVID risk factors can be identified and used to guide the team in a root cause analysis of a resident's loss of mobility. Equipped with this information, facilities can proactively decrease hospital readmission rates, positively impact quality measures and star ratings, and reduce risk during state surveys.

The role of the Physical Therapist has grown over the last two hundred years. History has shown us that adversity strengthens PTs making them more resilient and adaptable. COVID provided a platform to empower the PT to rethink, restructure, and redefine care practices solidifying the Physical Therapist's imprint in the ever-evolving healthcare continuum.

To learn about the Long COVID Recovery model and how Preferred Therapy Solutions can assist your facility, contact Jim MacManus, Director of Business Development, jmacmanus@preftherapy.com.

Sources:

History of Physical Therapy (physiotherapy-treatment.com)

Long COVID or Post-COVID Conditions | CDC

Long COVID is still disabling millions of Americans, CDC reports (axios.com)

later changed its name to the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA).
<https://www.apta.org/>



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Preferred Therapy Solutions is a full-service rehabilitation management organization dedicated to providing state-of-the-art clinical, management, billing, and information technology solutions to the post-acute and long-term care industry. Preferred Therapy Solutions is able to assist in developing a strategic road map designed to increase SNFs market share by identifying potential referral targets and providing useful information on competitor's performance. Preferred Therapy Solutions abilities significantly enhance the quality, productivity, scope, and efficiency of any facility's rehabilitation department while maintaining a focus on achieving high levels of patient satisfaction and providing excellent customer service.

