

Navigating Essential Healthcare Service After the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Alice Funez, President of VCU CARES Clinic



VCU CARES Clinic Student Working with Spinal Cord Injury Patient Image By: VCU News

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted public health across all fronts. With the shortage of income, poverty levels and homelessness rose. According to the [NIH](#), impoverished individuals often experience a disproportionate burden of health challenges that physical therapy is critical to aiding. Individuals face a variety of issues in receiving physical therapy treatment such as, accessing physical therapy services, transportation, cost, and lengthy wait times. In result, uninsured patients who cannot afford physical therapy become risk to worsening their issues which can become permanent.

In Richmond, VA, a study from the [NIH](#), found that around 17.1% of Richmond natives go without health insurance. This leaves around 6000 Richmond natives in having to pay for services such as physical therapy out-of-pocket.

However, there is also an issue of the influx of job openings for physical therapists. A study from the [APTA](#), found that 60% of respondents reported that vacancies had increased since

the pandemic. With the increase of costs, there is not only the issue of receiving care but also educating those who provide it. Many individuals cannot afford to continue school in physical therapy because of the overwhelming cost of student loans and receiving a degree.

The consequences of this shortage are devastating, leading to prolonged wait times for patients, with some being forced to wait months for treatment. This delay in care can have lasting repercussions on a patient's health.

In aiding the crisis, private and non-profit businesses have had to take charge of their community's health. In Richmond, the VCU CARES Clinic provides physical therapy care to uninsured individuals as well as transportation and translation services to make every patient's experience more accessible. The VCU CARES Clinic is also a student volunteer learning opportunity for physical therapy students at Virginia Commonwealth University. Students can shadow professionals and gain hands-on experience. Pro-bono physical therapy clinics such as the VCU CARES Clinic have become an integral part in uplifting their community's well-being. However, services only continue to operate with the help of their communities. Community members can engage with pro-bono clinics by participating in the organization's events, donating, and volunteering at the clinic.

Rebuilding our communities' public health after the pandemic is only achievable through community action. As we navigate these turbulent times, community support remains paramount in ensuring the continued operation and success of physical therapy services.

CARES Clinic prioritizes a quality healthcare experience to uninsured patients in the greater Richmond community through physical therapy, translation, and transportation services.