**COVID-19**

Anonymous

Department of English, East Carolina University

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Dr. Cheryl Dudasik-Wiggs

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on members of society, both personally and professionally. One community that has felt the full force of COVID restrictions and policies is healthcare workers. Constantly having to adapt to new circumstances, many healthcare workers are reconsidering their decision to enter the medical field. I am currently a sophomore at ECU planning to go into a health sciences career as a physical therapist. I am an exercise physiology major, so learning about how COVID-19 has affected my intended field was fascinating.

The physical therapy field experienced many changes throughout the course of the pandemic. As did many other professions, the PT field lost workers as a result of the pandemic. "In July 2020, 36% of physical therapists reported a decline in hours and 7% reported they had been laid off, 16% had been furloughed, and 2% had resigned or quit" (APTA, 2020). In a report published by the American Physical Therapy Association (2020), they said that prior to the pandemic, only 30% of practices had an emergency preparedness plan in place. As the pandemic neared its peak, this meant many PTs were looking for help.

One way they adapted to these challenges is through the increased use of telehealth. Before the start of the pandemic, 98% of PTs surveyed were not providing live video consults (APTA, 2020). By July of 2020, 47% reported providing live video consults (APTA, 2020). Physical therapists also began the use of proning and mobility teams. Proning is the practice of positioning COVID-19 patients on their stomachs instead of their backs. This helps to "Oxygenate the patient by reducing the pressure on the diaphragm and lungs, aids in draining lung fluids, and improves the effectiveness of the right heart ventricle which supplies the lungs with blood" (Oster et al., 2020). This method is done by mobility teams because it can take up to eight healthcare workers to move a heavily sedated patient to this position. These strategies have helped the physical therapy field adapt to some of the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although most PTs reported that the pandemic had not affected their pride in their career, 29% of PTs felt their career pride increase, in comparison with the 11% who said it declined (APTA, 2020).

In my personal life, the pandemic has been a period of adaptation and growth. The biggest lesson I learned from the pandemic is to be flexible and ready to adapt at any moment. The COVID-19 pandemic hit right before I graduated high school. I had the last three months of school online and did not know the status of graduation until about a month before it happened. Policies and rules about gatherings were constantly changing, and I often felt as though I was just rolling with the punches.

Being in college during the pandemic is a seemingly never-ending string of changes. The start of college is a time where you are supposed to meet new people and find friends with common interests. The best way to do that is to get to know the people on your hall in a dorm. This is significantly more difficult when you are unable to have non-residents in your room. The "normal college experience" got less normal as classes switched online, dorm residents were sent home, and the only way we could communicate with classmates was through a screen. As time progresses, things are slowly beginning to return to normal. I do believe that everyone who graduated high school and entered college during the pandemic have been able to bond over the circumstances. While the actual experience felt lonely, everyone had a shared sense and understanding of what each other was going through, which was a nice thought to remember.

**References**

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