

### RIQI/RI-PTN TCPI Exemplary Practice Story: Performance Physical Therapy



Above: The executive team and co-owners of Performance Physical Therapy. (L-R) Chief Clinical Officer-Dr. David Pavao, COO-Dr. Lisa DeCoste, DPT, OCS, VP of Operations-Dr. Joe Russolello, DPT, OCS, Chief Compliance Officer-Dr. Yvonne Swanson, DPT, MSPT, OCS, Chief Programs Officer-Dr. Brian Hay, DPT, MS, OCS, CEO-Dr. Michelle Collie, DPT, MS, OCS.

Performance Physical Therapy (Performance PT) is a 100% locally owned and operated physical therapy practice with 12 locations in Rhode Island and 2 in Massachusetts. As described on our website (<https://www.performanceptri.com/>), we are “the regions leading provider of innovative, results-driven physical therapy and athletic training services.” We are co-owned solely by physical therapists, and boast the highest number of board-certified clinicians in New England, with 65 licensed physical therapists and support staff on our team. At our facilities, we provided care for over 17,000 individuals in 2018, ranging from the weekend warriors, elite college athletes, post-op surgical patients and patients struggling with chronic pain. Our treatments include: physical therapy, aquatic therapy, concussion management, hand therapy and splinting, prenatal and postnatal care, dry needling, blood flow restriction therapy, athletic training, and more. Success at our organization can be seen in the fact that we complete about 14,000 new patient evaluations per year, which represents about 20% growth on an annual basis. We have also been voted Providence Business News Best Places to Work six years in a row and awarded the Physical National Private Practice of the Year in 2014. These achievements are due to our focus on our mission and values which guide us to distinction in the quality of the patient care we provide. Our positive culture, focus on the patient voice, and data informed approach make us a leader in innovation and excellence in our field.

#### Mission and Values that Drive Excellence with a Holistic Approach

At Performance PT, we strive for excellence in every area. In keeping with our core **Values**: *providing the best care, investing in relationships and embracing change*, we continuously seek to form key relationships with patients, staff, the community, and the payor community. We feel we are uniquely positioned to offer holistic, comprehensive care for all musculoskeletal conditions, which helps us to fulfill our **Purpose**: *allow patients to truly be empowered to lead healthy, fulfilling and happy lives*. In addition, our **Mission**: *to optimize the health of the communities we serve by providing access to innovative, results-driven physical therapy and athletic training services* informs all of our work, as we are committed to quality improvement and evidenced based treatment for each patient encounter.

It is also important to note an integral part of our Performance PT methodology includes taking into consideration that the general population is aging. People in their 40s are taking much more



responsibility for the activities in which they engage. So a lot of our approach is focused on becoming much more *holistic*. As our CEO, Dr. Michelle Collie, explains, “We are not just saying, ‘Oh your knees hurt? I am going to fix your knees and then, well...good luck.’ Rather, we are saying, ‘we are here to have a relationship with you, we are here as a resource for you.’ For instance, we might ask ‘what else are you doing for exercise, how are you managing your diet, do you need a gym to go to’? With this approach, we feel we are impacting people’s health *overall*, not just taking care of a knee or a shoulder. We are more than the sum of our hurting body parts!”

### **Joy in Work: A Positive Culture Supporting Positive Improvements**

At Performance PT, we foster a work environment that is fun and supportive. Some of our favorite staff events include our work birthday parties (they are a big hit!) and our holiday parties. At our annual holiday party in December last year, Senior Leadership put on a skit where we perform a song that we write for the occasion. Additionally, we have an Employee Perks program that has proven very popular. As part of this, we provide health and wellness reimbursements of the employee’s choice (gym, massage, etc.) up to \$75.00/quarter. We have a student loan advisor to help the new physical therapists with financial planning, and a mortgage advisor who can assist with obtaining a mortgage (and even discounts the closing costs). We provide Verizon discounts, and pay for professional association fees. All professional CEUs are provided in-house at no cost to the employee, giving them more than enough required for their licensing. These activities and benefits help our employees know we value them, and they know they are each important to our organization.

We also prioritize transparency and communication within our team at Performance PT. Even though we are growing, we want to be sure to keep everyone informed. We have a weekly newsletter for our staff which we call “In the Loop.” It contains everything from Electronic Medical Record (EMR) news to staff birthdays. We have an internal Facebook page and Dr. Michelle Collie (our CEO) organizes a Facebook Live event once per quarter. She speaks on a certain topic and then opens it up to questions from staff. Anyone can ask anything and it is recorded in case someone is not able to watch it live. We do weekly leadership emails to directors of the clinics and senior leadership to keep us all operating smoothly and in sync. We have a podcast on which we interview local physicians, surgeons, coaches, athletes and community members. <https://www.performanceptri.com/podcast>. On an annual basis, a Town Hall is held with staff which includes a dinner. Also, to be sure we are accurately hearing our staff and addressing their needs, we conduct an annual *Best Places to Work* survey. We get great information from this survey, and, as previously noted, we have been named one of *RI’s Best Places to Work* for several years in a row. Lastly, in quarters two and four, we do a *Net Promoter Survey* for staff (which is anonymous), and during quarter three we do the Gallop Q12 Index Survey, which is very informative.

### **Engaging Patients to Improve Care, Define Innovation, and Reduce Unnecessary Utilization and Cost**

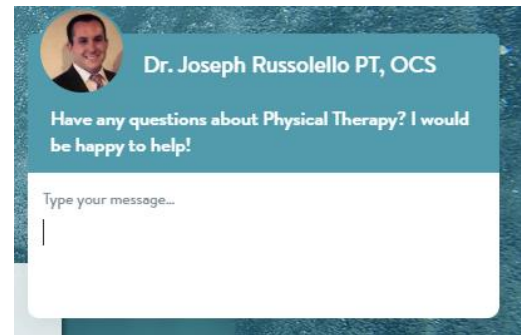
Along with using a *Net Promoter Survey* to gain information about the needs and concerns of our staff, we offer a *Net Promoter* survey for our patients a couple of times during the course of their treatment. This *Net Promoter* survey is built into our new EMR platform, so it is very easy to implement. Through the information we receive from patient responses, we are better able to improve our service quality. The survey measures patient satisfaction, and we can drill down to the clinic site and the therapist. We can analyze this data and share the outcomes with the therapists. If a patient scores us below a 7, the therapist gets pinged immediately and is tasked with trying to figure out what he/she did wrong or right, and we address that as a team. This ensures we identify opportunities for quality improvement of our services in a timely manner.

We also do a *Care Survey* with our patients once per year. This survey measures empathy. It directs patients to consider the therapist and all of our administrative staff as well, and asks how they measure up with regard to empathy. A low empathy score for a therapist can lead to early drop-offs in treatment and lack of compliance for patients, so we really want to intervene if we see that happening. When results suggest it may be beneficial, our leadership offers the staff person education and assistance around developing a more compassionate and empathetic practice style with their patients.

Through surveys, we gain insight into our patients needs and perspectives so that we can use this data to continuously improve our approach and care. From understanding our patients, we are best positioned to improve and innovate to better meet their needs. For example, we are aware that some characteristics of our population that affect our aims and priorities revolve around social determinants of health. Attrition can be expected when there is a problem with a ride to an appointment or a lack of child care. We try to help by assisting our patients with using the RIDE program in RI, which is a state run transport company that can bring individuals to appointments. We also utilize translators when needed for language issues. We really work to break down any barriers to good health care that we possibly can.

Another way we enhance our service quality is through our program called “Exercise as Medicine”. We allow patients to go to our clinic gym for workouts even after their treatment program is completed. By doing so, patients can continue progressing with their optimal health and wellness under the watch of a therapist. When the clinic is open, a therapist is there, so the patient always receives supervision. Access available on demand- with a watchful eye- can equal greater patient participation and improved health outcomes.

More and more, we are leveraging innovative approaches that engage technology to help overcome barriers that patients experience. Once such innovation is our online “pop-up Physical Therapist” chat window which is staffed by a real physical therapist (as shown in the adjacent picture). Dr. Russolello’s phone is pinged when someone asks an online question, and he gets right back to them. We also have a patient portal through which our patients can review their specific exercises, and ask any questions of their therapist from the comfort of their own home.



*At Performance PT, we work to improve our services through leveraging technology and an innovative approach. An example of this can be seen in our “pop-up Physical Therapist” that is available on our website.*

To improve our practice’s efficiency, utilization, and service quality, we are also currently looking into telemedicine platforms to increase access. There are physical therapy telemedicine platforms springing up that are HIPAA compliant and we are actively looking to implement one in the near future. For instance, a PT would do an evaluation, and then follow-up by checking in with the patient via phone calls instead of home visits. The therapist might not need to go to the home daily if they can “see” the patients, “see” their post-op wounds, and talk to them. The ability to use telemedicine would help our profession within a bundled payment model. From this perspective, telemedicine can arguably be used to reduce unnecessary hospitalizations and testing, as we can provide a quick screen of the patient and make the most appropriate referral. If there is a complication, we would no longer be as apt to send the patient to the Emergency Room; we can refer them back to the primary care provider or surgeon for follow-up, instead.

In addition to telemedicine on our horizon, we already offer same day appointments for urgent issues. Having openings in our schedule everyday reduces emergency room visits as we can provide immediate care and relief for many musculoskeletal problems, such as sudden onset low back pain. Educating our patients on when not to go to the emergency room is an ongoing effort in our practice. We also discuss when it is appropriate to use narcotic pain medication and when it may be appropriate to wean and stop the medicine. The current opioid crisis is always on our minds, and we train our therapists to intervene as needed by communicating the risks/benefits with patients and keeping the primary care provider or surgeon informed. In treating discomfort, it is also important to note that passive modalities formerly utilized in PT practices, such as muscle stimulation, we now rarely use. APTA has clinical guidelines that we follow carefully in order to decrease the use of many outdated procedures, thereby providing the best care possible while reducing costs.

### **Leveraging a Data Driven Approach for Constant, Clinical Improvements**

Of course, our Quality Improvement mindset translates to an understanding of the value of data in determining the success of our interventions and outcomes. Through our participation in TCPI (Transforming Clinical Practice Initiative) as part of the RI PTN (Practice Transformation Network), we reported on a number



Performance Physical Therapy			
Quality Measure	Performance Target	Current Performance	National MIPS Benchmark
Prevention			
Body Mass Index (BMI) Screening and Follow-up Plan	96%	91%	45%
Documentation of Current Medications in the Medical Record <sup>a</sup>	100%	96%	89%
Disease Management			
Functional Outcome Assessment <sup>a</sup>	100%	98%	96%
Falls: Plan of Care <sup>a</sup>	100%	100%	76%
Falls: Risk Assessment <sup>a</sup>	100%	94%	93%
Pain Assessment and Follow-up <sup>a</sup>	100%	94%	87%

*As seen in the data above, Performance PT succeeded in exceeding the National MIPS Benchmarks for each of the Quality Measures we tracked, including BMI, Documentation of Current Medications, Functional Outcomes Assessments and Assessment of Falls and Pain.*

of Clinical Quality Measures that were relevant to our care, such as measures addressing *Body Mass Index Screening and Follow-up Plan* and *Functional Outcome Assessment*. As can be seen in the adjacent table, our performance in this effort was excellent and exceeded the National MIPS Benchmarks for all measures.

Given the importance of data in understanding our achievement of goals, for the last several years we have invested efforts in an improvement project centered on implementing FOTO (Focus on Therapeutic Outcomes, Inc.). Started in 1992 by a group of Physical Therapists, FOTO delivers “an overall picture of clinic performance, quality of care, and patient engagement while driving documentation that leaves the practice confidently prepared for alternative payment models” (as described on the

FOTO website: <https://www.fotoinc.com>). Once implemented, FOTO bolstered the evolution of our clinical staff in helping patients reach their goals and learn how to function at higher levels. FOTO helps with care planning as well as driving our professional development. To use FOTO, patients fill out questionnaires and we get their scores and information. The patient and clinician can then use this data to guide care. It informs them on how many visits a condition might take to rehab, but if there are other red flags, it reminds the provider and helps them address all aspects of pain and function. FOTO automatically adjusts for age and other co-morbidities using risk adjustments and predictive analytics. It is a national benchmarking data base and we chose it because of the years of robust data that it contains. As described by our Chief Compliance Officer, Dr. Yvonne Swanson: “We implemented the outcomes system FOTO to help provide data driven support and clinical outcomes information to our patients, clinicians, providers and insurance companies. It was a giant step in the right direction toward standardized care which also helped our clinicians grow clinically. Each individual clinical evaluation is supported by risk adjusted predicted outcomes and compared to national averages. It just made sense in this value driven payment environment, as we have to support our care choices with good data.”

### Conclusion

At Performance PT, our success is driven by our mission and values, which we use to focus all aspects of our approach. With these goals in mind, we strive to provide excellence in patient care. We are proud that we are able to serve a wide range of individuals using our holistic approach. As seen in the Appendix, we have a number of wonderful patient testimonials which provide excellent examples of the patient experience at Performance PT. Our combination of a strong work culture, a focus on the patient voice, and our use of data make us a true leader in innovation and excellence in our field. Our success in implementing our FOTO improvement project is an example of how we demonstrate value to payor organizations. Based on our experience using FOTO, we approached a payor in RI and made the case that the PT practices getting patients better faster and getting the best outcomes should be getting paid more. The payor was happy to agree to do that, but first required all PTs in Rhode Island to adopt FOTO. Many were not ready to do this due to financial and other reasons. They were perhaps fearful of the change. We are very hopeful now that with MIPS participation for physical therapists, we will see payment for value based care and positive clinical outcomes rather than volume and duration of services. We are proud to be an organization that embraces this type of positive change.

## APPENDIX

### Patient Testimonials

#### Gaining Confidence Through Recovery



After a motorcycle accident forced 22-year-old Emily Doucette to put her plans on hold, she decided to do whatever it would take to get her life back on track.

Last May, Emily graduated from Lasell College where she studied fashion and finished with a degree in retail merchandising. Like most students, Emily had no idea what she wanted to do when she started school 4 years ago but decided to go with her gut and pick a career combining her love of fashion and the world of business.

After graduating, Emily was considering her job options, but before making any plans, she got into a motorcycle accident that left her with a broken pelvis along with many other injuries. Due to the severity of her injuries, Emily was forced to put all her plans on hold. "The accident was really traumatic, and for a while, I was in a wheelchair then getting around with a walker, so I was really anxious about leaving the house" shared Emily. Rather than spending her summer looking for a job, Emily spent the next few months dedicated to her recovery.

Over the next 4 months, Emily spent almost every day in the house due to her anxieties and the pain from her injuries, but tried to find ways to keep busy that wouldn't require too much physical effort. Always having a love for art, but never finding the time to work on projects before, she knew that now would be the perfect time to give her artistic side a chance. Emily chose projects like crafting wall art, drawing, and even creating a self-portrait as her favorite ways to pass the time.

Although reluctant to leave the house, Emily knew it was time to begin physical therapy, so last October she made an appointment with [Dr. Carolyn Rhoads](#) at the Smithfield clinic and even spent some appointments working with pelvic health specialist [Dr. Melissa Nassaney](#).

With almost 7 months of hard work behind her, Emily is feeling great but knows that she still had some more work to put in. "Everyone I met here has been super nice and encouraging, and they've really made a difference and made my recovery fun" she smiled. Not only has physical therapy helped with the pain, and getting Emily back to walking, but it has really built up her confidence, leading to a more independent life, like being able to leave the house with ease.

"Emily has worked exceptionally hard at Physical therapy over the past few months" Shared Dr. Rhoads. "She has worked through her difficult days and taken her rehab in stride. Emily's positive attitude, drive, and strength have motivated me as both a person and Physical Therapist. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Emily and I am so pleased to see her getting back to her normal activities including going to the gym, returning to work, and doing handstands! Keep up the good work Emily! You rock!" expressed Dr. Rhoads.

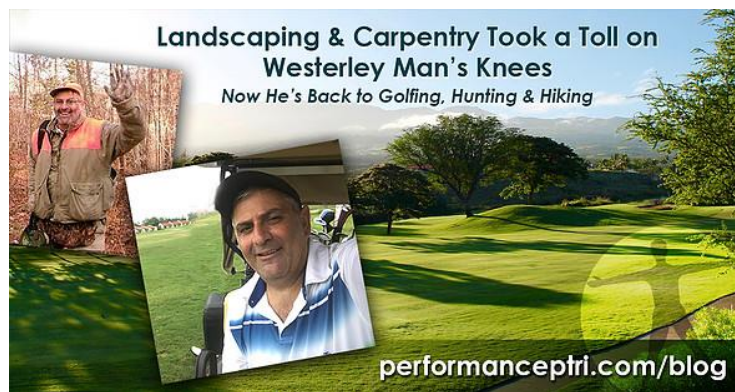
“Now that I'm coming to the end of my recovery, I'm really just going to take the time and figure everything out” Emily shared. Although Emily still has a few more kinks to work out in physical therapy, she is so excited for all the opportunities that will come her way once she's finally pain-free and able to get back to work, and life.

For now, Emily is excited to get back to a more active life and even plans on starting yoga classes now that she can move more freely. She's also looking forward to continuing her newfound love for art, deciding what career path to go down, and is truly looking forward to whatever comes next.

### **Landscaping & Carpentry Took a Toll on Westerly Man's Knees**

Years of wear and tear on his knees left Nate unable to hike, hunt, and golf after having four arthroscopic surgeries.

Nate Gencarelli has spent the past 47 years living in Westerly, RI, and 25 of those years, focusing on growing his career in the area. He loves to spend his time outdoors; hunting, hiking, golfing, or going for walks. Landscaping and carpentry have also been hobbies of Nate, so every week he's out in the yard, but over the years all of his activities have taken a toll on his knees.



Getting outdoors and staying active has become increasingly difficult for Nate and over the last 25 years he has needed 3 arthroscopic surgeries on his knee. This past year, he decided that his knee was doing well enough to focus more of his attention on losing weight. Nate was going to the gym, taking walks and hikes every day, and was happy to be focusing on his weight loss journey, until he tweaked his knee.

Eventually, he couldn't walk or even sit down without experiencing pain and after a few months, it was determined that he would need another knee surgery. Early this December, Nate underwent his fourth arthroscopic knee surgery, but left with excessive swelling. When it wasn't getting any better, he knew he needed some more help, so he made an appointment with [Dr. Cara Kenyon](#) at the [Richmond clinic](#).

Within just a few weeks, the swelling was gone, and he was back to walking pain-free and focusing on his goals of losing weight. “I can't say enough how grateful I am for Cara, Paige, and the rest of the staff” Nate smiled. He is on track to his journey of losing 30 pounds and is ready for hunting, hiking & golfing this Spring.