

## Improving the lives of those with neck or back pain

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The Honorable Ralph Northam  
Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia  
P.O. Box 1475  
Richmond, Virginia 23218

April 17, 2020

Dear Governor Northam,

I am the CEO of the National Spine Health Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to improving spine health through education, research, and patient advocacy. I am also a successful recipient of spinal fusion surgery which spared my spinal cord and has made me a passionate advocate for others.

Nearly 100 million Americans suffer from debilitating neck and back pain. In addition, 40% of Americans will miss work days due to neck and spine issues and eight out of ten Americans will suffer from back and neck issues in their lifetime. This suffering can also lead to depression and a reliance on unhealthy coping behaviors such as an increase in substance abuse.

Therefore, it is essential that spine and neck issues be treated appropriately to avoid further injury and suffering. However, many spine patients are becoming worse due to the delay in their surgery as a result of COVID-19 guidelines since many of these surgeries are defined as "elective". A "one size fits all" definition of "elective" is not appropriate in deciding priorities in medical treatment. This is particularly true when spine patients' conditions are worsening due to restrictions on surgeries. In addition, many hospitals currently have the appropriate PPE in stock to safely and effectively perform surgery, as the PPE used to treat COVID-19 patients (such as N-95 masks) is different than what is used in the operating room. With supplies on hand, and with adherence to strict hygienic guidelines, patients who are suffering should be afforded safe and effective treatment including surgery.

I urge you to support allowing spine physicians to proceed with surgeries that are needed to protect patient's health outcomes from worsening. Please allow for a more flexible definition of "essential" when considering the priority of a patient's care. It goes without saying that patients, their families, and the medical community must follow the sanitary guidelines required to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during any medical encounter.

I appreciate your consideration of my request and would be happy to provide you more information on The National Spine Health Foundation.

Sincerely,



Rita Roy, MD  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
The National Spine Health Foundation