



WVU Medicine program provides free VIP concussion care to domestic violence survivors

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MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — Domestic violence survivors who have suffered concussions have been given "VIP treatment" at WVU Medicine's Rockefeller Neuroscience Institute since early last year, granting vulnerable patients top-tier care at no cost.

RNI Concussion and Brain Injury Center Director Dr. Javier Cárdenas explained that since early 2024, the institute has been collaborating with WVU Medicine emergency departments across the state, as well as organizations like HOPE, Inc. and the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, to identify domestic violence survivors suffering from concussions.

Once domestic violence survivors are referred to the RNI's NueroPerformance Innovation Center, they enter the institute's Domestic Violence Injury Program (dVIP), which grants them access to free cutting-edge treatment that's typically reserved for professional athletes.

"VIP services are available around the country at just about every hospital for people who have financial means," Cárdenas said. "However, there are others ... who should be afforded the same opportunities. The population we feel is the greatest in need for us is the domestic violence survivor. We're providing a genuine VIP service, and we want to make sure that this isn't a surface-level experience for these individuals. We used concierge models as a model for the dVIP program. We have a very hands-on approach, and they have access to care that other people do not."

In addition to working one-on-one with a "patient navigator" at the institute, those in the VIP program receive comprehensive "physical, emotional and cognitive" care for their brain injuries.



The WVU Medicine Rockefeller Institute is offering free VIP treatment to domestic violence survivors who have experienced concussions.



Javier Cárdenas, M.D.

"We help with things like headaches, vision changes, balance problems, sleep issues, anxiety, depression and thinking problems," Cárdenas said. "They also have access to our cafe and full access to our staff. ... Once they're part of the dVIP program, they're always part of the dVIP program."

Although the RNI's NeuroPerformance Innovation Center was tailored to benefit professional athletes, Cárdenas said there are many parallels between head injuries suffered by athletes and domestic violence survivors, and the treatment process is surprisingly similar.



WVU Medicine Rockefeller Institute NeuroPerformance Innovation Center Occupational Therapist Amanda Miller demonstrates how a device at the center treats concussion patients by strengthening their coordination and balance.

The treatments and therapies at the innovation center are therefore also utilized by dVIP patients, with the program treating more than 60 domestic violence survivors since its inception in 2024.

"The consequences are similar to identical," Cárdenas said. "Headaches are the No. 1 complaint from both domestic violence survivors and those with sports-related concussions. They're incredibly treatable. We can treat (it all)."

Cárdenas added that the RNI is committed to providing a depth of services to those in dVIP without putting the patients further at risk, and he and his team acknowledge that domestic violence survivors may be in shelters or unstable living situations, and they often visit the RNI long after their concussions occur.

"While we would love to see them early after their injuries, we recognize that there are a lot of reasons why we don't," Cárdenas said. "It could be their own personal or financial wellbeing or that they have kids. We don't pass judgment, even if they return to their abuser. Our role is to take care of the person across from us."