

PCRMM WEBINAR: 'Rehabilitation after Covid19' Feb 23rd

A timely, thought provoking and informative event exploring patient experience of longer term Covid conditions.

We are very grateful to the speakers, Dr David Salman, Dr Amal Hassan and Cathy Thompson for finding time to share their insights and experience with us.

For some people infection with Covid 19 can be the beginning of a long process of recovery or possibly of a new normal, of living with the impact of the disease over an extended period.

Dr Salman and Dr Hassan outlined their research on these longer-term conditions. Progress has been made, however the full scope of their impacts on the health and activity of the people they affect are not yet fully recognised, let alone fully understood.

Dr Salman defined the terminology of the condition for those not readily recovering from the infection as:

- **Acute Covid-19** – signs and symptoms continue for up to 4 weeks.
- **Ongoing symptomatic Covid 19** – signs and symptoms continue for up to 12 weeks.
- **Post Covid-19 Syndrome** signs and symptoms that develop during and after an infection consistent with Covid 19, continue for more than 12 weeks and are not explained by an alternative diagnosis.

Dr Hassan outlined the challenges of working with patients with a disease with multisystem impacts, fluctuating symptoms, presenting with a lack of clinical uniformity with no clinical tests or diagnostic criteria to help anchor clinical practice. In this situation, patient-focused research is essential in order to build a common understanding through exploring individual, ongoing personal experience.

Dr Hassan described a range of symptoms and the key indicators which support clinical diagnosis of fatigue, post-exertion malaise and brain fog. She discussed indications of gender differences in the impact of Long Covid and the increasing numbers of cases being referred back in from the community.

The potential risks of exercise in rehabilitation is now recognised. Any programmes should be tailored to the individual and the outcomes carefully monitored. In her practice, careful pacing, avoiding symptom flares and maintaining equilibrium, a balance across all aspects of the patient's health is the underpinning goal.

It is very early days in our understanding the disease and the best mechanisms for rehabilitation. Researchers are yet to see numbers of people in full recovery.

Cathy Thompson spoke from both her experience as a clinician and lived experience of longcovid.

She prompted delegates to ensure that wherever possible there is a personalised approach to care, one that allows patients to fully tell their story. 'Be curious – ask questions'. In terms of the way forward for rehabilitation it was clear that 'one size does not fit all'.

In this instance, for recovering patients, 'exercise may not be the best medicine.' A high proportion of people with longcovid have worsening or relapsing symptoms with activity and exercise. She warned that care should be taken in deciding on recommended activity as relapses can last weeks or months.

She advocated appropriate risk stratification when people return to exercise and activity, including assessment and monitoring of potential post-exertional malaise. Where they can, patients should fully contribute to this process by monitoring themselves.

Cathy questioned what we mean by 'recovery'. It should not be assumed that a patient's fitness and activity levels can necessarily return to their pre-Covid levels.

The session may have left people with more questions than answers, but also with a greater appreciation of the challenges to be faced in supporting people post Covid with prolonged symptoms.

The need for further research is evident. The fact that people with these conditions will need ongoing support is clear. The pandemic may be moving to a new phase but the challenge of how post-covid symptoms impact on individuals will most certainly remain.

All the talks will be available via our website from the 1st March.

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Dr David Salman is a GP and clinical research fellow at Imperial College, London. He is interested in the role of physical activity in prevention of disease, and how to increase physical activity in the general population whilst mitigating risks. His recent article in the BMJ can be found here. [Returning to physical activity after covid-19 | The BMJ](#)

Dr Amal Hassan is a Registrar in Sports & Exercise Medicine at the London Deanery. She has special interests in women's medicine, longcovid and fatigue.

Cathy Thompson works as an APP in Musculoskeletal clinics at the Royal Surrey Hospital, Guildford. She has had Longcovid for the past ten months. She is a member of the Longcovid physio group, a peer support group for physiotherapists and support workers living with Longcovid, which also has an education and advocacy role. She is also involved in patient-led groups for longcovid Research.