

LETTER | Awareness of post-Covid-19 condition

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LETTER | As of June 29, a total of 677,751 Covid-19 patients have recovered and returned to the community. Most of them have returned to normal health, but some may complain of symptoms that last for weeks or even months after recovery from Covid-19.

The following are some of the complaints:

"I get very tired every day. I used to be able to walk long distances before. Nowadays, I am unable to walk fast or long distances because I will have difficulty breathing."

"I used to give speeches, but now I can't even say more than two or three sentences as I have been wheezing almost every day."

"I have trouble understanding and thinking now."

“I have difficulty using the PowerPoint slides I prepared for teaching my students, my brain just got blank and I didn’t know what I should do.”

Besides the above, complaints like headache, loss of smell or taste, dizziness on standing, palpitations or increased heartbeat, chest pain, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, cough, joint or muscle pain, depression or anxiety, fever, symptoms that get worse after physical or mental activities etc are also reported after patients’ recovery.

These symptoms are caused by the patients’ body's response to the virus continuing beyond the initial illness. These symptoms are named Post-Covid-19 condition or Long Covid.

Long Covid may continue for weeks or months beyond the initial illness. Long Covid can happen to any Covid-19 patients, even patients who were not hospitalised or had mild illness. Some patients develop medical complications that may have lasting health effects.

As Covid-19 is a new disease and Long Covid is even newer, only some preliminary findings are being reported from the West. In Malaysia, there is only one study conducted among 1,004 Covid-19 patients in stages four and five in the hospital setting.

It was reported that 66 percent of them experienced symptoms like fatigue, breathing difficulties during activity, insomnia, cough, and anxiety, for up to three months or longer after infection. There is no data about the post-Covid-19 condition from patients who were without symptoms or with milder manifestation (those from stages one to three).

We need more Information from all Covid-19 patients who recovered and went back to the community, on the duration of Long Covid, what are the proportions of those who did or did not experience Long Covid, what are the common symptoms experienced, whether patients seek treatment or not, their ability to resume physical function as before illness, mental status and proportion of them returning to work etc.

With over half a million Covid-19 patients who recovered in the country, even if a small percentage of them experience long-term debility, this could have health and economic consequences for the country.

In order to increase the awareness on Long Covid among recovered Covid-19 patients, for clinicians and researchers to better understand the post-Covid-19 conditions and to provide information to the stakeholders for the planning of health programmes, the research team from the Centre of Epidemiology and Evidence Based Practice, University of Malaya has initiated a short survey among

the recovered Covid-19 patients who were discharged back to the community.

We hope all post-Covid-19 patients, with or without any Long Covid symptoms, will actively participate in the survey. We do not collect names or contact details for anonymity. All data will remain confidential and the findings will be presented collectively. The link to the survey is here. Thank you for your participation.

The best method to prevent Long Covid is to prevent Covid-19. Practice all standard operating procedures (SOPs), avoid crowds and poorly ventilated indoor spaces and get vaccinated when available.

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