

Addition to the evidence submitted by the Royal College of General Practitioners Wales to the Welsh Parliament Health, Social Care and Sport Committee inquiry into the Covid-19 outbreak on health and social care in Wales: Post-Covid Syndrome

Thank you for the opportunity to add to our initial written evidence to the Committee regarding the pandemic. At the time of our first submission the topic of Post-Covid Syndrome (Long Covid) was only beginning to emerge. Even today, understanding of this ailment which can manifest very differently in different patients is still to be fully understood. As such, much of our evidence to the Committee focuses less on definitive treatments and more on the necessity of support, knowledge sharing and awareness.

RCGP worked with NICE and the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) to produce guidelines which were published in December last year:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/news/article/nice-rcgp-and-sign-publish-guideline-on-managing-the-long-term-effects-of-covid-19>. This best practice advice is primarily aimed at health professionals but also provides information for patients, including what they should expect in terms of care. This is important in providing them with the health literacy to engage with clinicians in an empowered manner.

The College has raised questions about care for those with Post-Covid Syndrome with the Chief Medical Officer and is of the view that it is vital there is close communication and cooperation between the health boards while we are all learning about the lasting effects of COVID-19 on some patients.

There must also be clear pathways for self-help, so that patients can be empowered to take steps towards their own recovery. As was demonstrated in the findings of the report 'Unmet needs of people with breathing and other difficulties after COVID-19' by the British Lung Foundation and Asthma UK, there remains considerable uncertainty about the nature of Post-Covid Syndrome as it does not neatly fit into the description of COVID-19 which has become the dominant discourse during the pandemic.

In addition, as Post-Covid Syndrome does not fit the narrative around COVID-19 it can present difficulties for patients in terms of their employment. They may be clear of COVID-19 and able to return to work, but not at full capacity and thus employers must treat the symptoms of Post-Covid Syndrome as they would a staged and gentle return to work following a physical injury which requires ongoing rehabilitation.

We know considerably more about this form of ailment than we did six months ago, but we are very much still in learning mode and this can make it difficult to provide the clear answers which patients would ideally desire. We need easy access to investigations for those with clinical impairment as if there is evidence of myocarditis patients should avoid exercise. At this stage it is crucial that we develop a shared knowledge base built on research and best practice from within Wales and beyond.