

Long Covid - a new dawn... (and a booster on the horizon)

Following a promise that "Long Covid" clinics were being set up around the country I followed a Webinar on Tuesday evening (while the football was on) celebrating the start of a clinic set up in Kent.

Those that have Long Covid will need no explanation but it is being seen as an entirely new illness. This may be unsurprising as Covid is new, however, it is felt that as the after-effects can cause damage to almost every body part, or system, a totally new approach needs to be taken.

A patient questionnaire is completed, blood tests taken and most likely a chest x-ray and ecg will be needed before some physical tests are done in the Surgery with one of the nursing team. These are all sent to the clinic who will chew it over among themselves and then call the patient to try and work out a management plan to achieve improvement.

The Webinar was interesting and welcome as it finally showed the commitment by the NHS to commission this service. Despite the enthusiasm of the team, no one was able to tell us "what the treatment is" as there is no magic pill and no one-size-fits-all solution. What was evident is that nearly half of the patients seen so far have benefited from input from psychotherapists demonstrating the huge impact of chronic pain/fatigue on our emotional wellbeing. Exercise classes and onward referral to specialists can also be made as each case is individually assessed.

The inclusion group for referral are explicitly those people who have definitely had Covid and on recovery have just never got back to normal. Most commonly this includes fatigue, breathlessness, poor exercise tolerance, pain and "fog".

So is this really a new illness? Surely the list above will resonate with anyone that has suffered from ME, post viral fatigue, chronic Lymes and fibromyalgia... Hopefully this is the start of providing a multi-disciplinary approach to this cluster of illness that either have no specific or commonly available treatment. What we can take is that there is a massive impact from waking up every day knowing that you are going to feel tired again in a minute and that the tasks you used to eat up are now a struggle or totally impossible. If people experience these issues please pick up the phone to us or have a look at Moodzone or the Kent Mental Wellbeing sites as these are a great resource to help coping with the relentless daily battle.

We certainly have a few people on our radar with probable Long Covid so the referral process has already started for a couple of people. For those others out there that had Covid and never recovered fully please reach out either by email or phone so that we can organise our response and investigation panel before establishing if this new clinic can be of help to you.

To come full circle we also got the first sniff of the intentions of the booster dose of Covid vaccine. Apparently we start from 3rd September which coincides with the seasonal Flu campaign. A first wave includes the elderly, care homes, health workers and extremely vulnerable. The second wave will be the over 50's and those with long term conditions. Up to 75% of vaccines will be given in primary care and we are up for it. With only 2 months to plan we do need a bit more to go on though... More news to come as we get it.

Warmest wishes to all on behalf of Woodchurch Surgery - Dr Jack Hickey GP