

POST-COVID SYNDROME: PREVALENCE, COURSE FORMS, DIAGNOSTIC ASPECTS

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Relevance of the topic

Post-COVID syndrome also known as long COVID refers to symptoms persisting for more than three weeks after the diagnosis of COVID-19. We reviewed the current evidence on post-COVID syndrome, focusing on its clinical manifestations and addressing the challenges for its management in primary healthcare. The incidence of post-COVID syndrome is estimated at 10–35%, while for hospitalized patients it may reach 85%. Fatigue is the most common symptom reported in 17.5–72% of post-COVID cases, followed by residual dyspnea with an incidence ranging from 10–40%. Mental problems, chest pain, and olfactory and gustatory dysfunction may affect up to 26, 22 and 11% of patients, respectively.

More than one third of patients with post-COVID syndrome have pre-existing comorbidities, hypertension and diabetes mellitus being the most common. Beyond the prolonged duration of symptoms, the scarce published data indicate that most patients with post-COVID syndrome have a good prognosis with no further complications or fatal outcomes reported. Given the clinical spectrum of patients with post-COVID syndrome, most of them will be managed by primary healthcare professionals, in conjunction with pre-existing or new co-morbidities, which, in turn, may increase the burden of COVID-19 on primary healthcare. In conclusion approximately 10% of patients with COVID-19 may have symptoms persisting beyond three weeks, fulfilling the criteria of post-COVID syndrome. Primary healthcare professionals have a key role in the management of patients with post-COVID syndrome. Research is needed to elucidate the pathogenesis, clinical spectrum, and prognosis of post-COVID syndrome.

Research objective: post-covid syndrome: prevalence, course forms, study of diagnostic aspects



Methods

We read the abstracts of a total of 125 articles and selected 60 articles based on their relevance. Of them, 45 articles were used in the current review, including five review articles referring to COVID-19, its complications and primary healthcare services, and one scientific book. Articles focusing on the most common symptoms of post-COVID syndrome were selected. Evaluation of the quality of the included studies was based on the fact that only peer-reviewed studies published in core medical journals pertaining to post-COVID syndrome were selected. We also included information from seven official public health and scientific websites.

Conclusion

Post-COVID syndrome, which affects approximately 10% of COVID-19 patients, is not limited to patients with severe acute COVID-19. Symptoms of post-COVID syndrome are usually mild, showing improvement with time, and with no identified predictors. Fatigue, dyspnea, chest pain, mental health problems, and protracted olfactory and gustatory dysfunction are the most common symptoms of post-COVID syndrome. It is expected that primary healthcare will play a vital role in the management of patients with post-COVID syndrome. In addition, registries to actively and systemically follow-up COVID-19 patients are imperative, to estimate the incidence, clinical spectrum, and outcome of patients with post-COVID syndrome.

