

Reducing the Burden of Disease: A Cognitive Behavioral Treatment Program for Long COVID

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The World Health Organization defines Long COVID as the persistence of COVID-associated symptoms lasting for at least 3 months or more following initial COVID-19 infection with no alternative diagnoses to account for these symptoms for the past two months. Increasing numbers of patients continue to be seen at our large tertiary medical center with persistent symptoms following an initial COVID-19 infection. Estimates of as many as 50% of patients initially infected with COVID-19 have persistent symptoms. Symptoms most often associated with Long COVID include shortness of breath, fatigue, palpitations, tachycardia, exercise intolerance, post-exertional malaise, chest pain, cognitive difficulties, dizziness, lightheadedness, and sleep disturbance. Anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder have been frequently associated with the other persistent somatic symptoms. The burden of this disease has included a significant impact on personal health as well as economic factors such as ability to return to work.

In response to increasing demand for assistance, an innovative Cognitive-Behavioral treatment program was developed to provide these patients with skills and strategies to decrease their symptoms and manage their psychological distress following a comprehensive medical evaluation. The intervention was based on a conceptualization that Long COVID is a post viral central sensitization syndrome. We will present the first 165 patients seen in this structured intensive outpatient treatment program. Demographic data and clinical information will be described with details on patient satisfaction, physical functioning, and level of psychological distress.