

Assessing the impact of low mood and anxiety at initial presentation to a Long COVID assessment service

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Aims and Hypothesis

We aimed to review if patients presenting to a long COVID assessment service had symptoms of low mood and/or anxiety compared to before their illness.

Background

The COVID pandemic has placed a greater pressure on the U.K.s already strained mental health services.¹ The range of symptoms patients with Long COVID develop is growing and include depression and anxiety.² There is recognition that the medical community would benefit from a greater understanding of how Long COVID can impact mental health and what we can do to support this. The Long COVID assessment Hub covers counties Cheshire and Merseyside, a combined population of 2.6 million. Once referrals are screened, patients complete a telephone consultation with a clinician.

Methods

Retrospective analysis of patients reviewed in our Long COVID assessment hub between February and April 2020. Patients were asked to score their anxiety and depression on a 0-10 scale (0 = no change, 10 = maximal) at the time of review and retrospectively for pre-COVID illness. Patients scoring above a certain threshold in either low mood or anxiety scores would then complete PHQ9³ or GAD7⁴ for further assessment.

Results

248 (74.9%) reported worsening low mood
251 (75.6%) reported worsening anxiety

Patients reported an average pre-COVID anxiety score of 1.6, and 4.7 at time of review with an average increase of 3.0 ($P < 0.0001$)

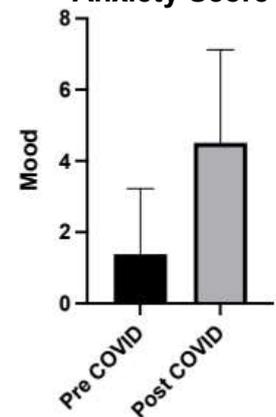
Patients reported an average pre-COVID low mood score of 1.4 and 4.5 at time of review with an average increase of 3.0. ($P < 0.0001$)

145 patients completed a GAD7 and 112 completed a PHQ9.

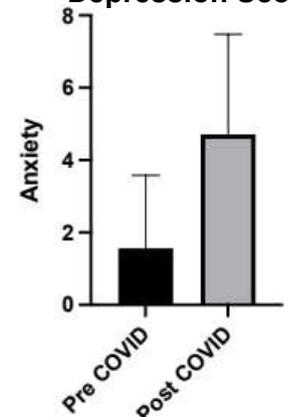
Of these patients 135 scored ≥ 5 in the GAD7 which is indicative of mild anxiety, including 29 mild, 63 moderate and 43 severe.

112 scored ≥ 5 in the PHQ9 to meet or exceed the criteria for mild depression, including 14 mild, 36 moderate, 35 moderately severe and 27 severe.

Self Reported Anxiety Score



Self Reported Depression Score



Conclusions

We found that patients reported increased anxiety and low mood during Long COVID illness when compared to prior to developing COVID. Given the uncertainty around the future of Long COVID it may be that extra provisions will be required to ensure the mental health needs of this population can be met.