

A New Professional Society for Post-COVID Condition and Other Post-Viral Conditions

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A new professional society for clinicians working in post-COVID condition (Clinical Post-COVID Society) has been set up to provide a professional network to help advance this field of medicine (www.clinicalpcs.org.uk). Post-COVID condition or long COVID is a novel multisystem condition that has affected at least 2 million individuals in the UK and over 200 million individuals worldwide.¹ The condition, in some, can evolve into a long-term condition (persistent long COVID), and current estimates are there are more than 750 000 individuals in the UK alone who have been experiencing symptoms for more than 2 years.² The worldwide estimate for persistent long covid is estimated to be over 50 million.

In the UK, NHS England currently funds 100 dedicated services for adults and 13 hubs for children and young people to provide care to individuals with moderate to severe long COVID. These services are staffed by a range of disciplines, including medics, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, speech and language therapists, and dietitians. Services either act as integrated pathways across secondary care and community services or are community-based. There are similar clinics in other countries across the globe.

The field of post-viral conditions/syndromes, due to the multisystem nature of the condition, cuts across the standard organ-based specialties, with no conventional hospital specialty in a position to manage the condition completely by its own. Given the number of professional disciplines needed to manage the condition, the field also does not sit neatly under one defined professional discipline (such as medical, physiotherapy, or occupational therapy). Hence, with the help and vision of NHS England, a new professional society has been set up under the banner of the British Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (BSPRM), UK's professional society for physicians and other clinicians involved in providing rehabilitative care in long-term conditions (irrespective of organ system involved).

The new clinical society will provide opportunities for networking and strategic leadership and guidance in the clinical management of long covid for adults and children and young people. There will be a diverse multidisciplinary clinical leadership team to reflect the varied expertise needed to care for patients with long covid. The society will facilitate developing position papers on best practices and link them with guidelines

being developed by various stakeholders, including the National Institute for Health and Clinical Care Excellence (NICE). The society will host national and international courses and conferences in this field of medicine and develop educational and training packages for interested clinicians.

Membership of the society will be open to all health and care professionals involved in the management and care of patients with long COVID. In addition, membership will also be made available to those individuals who have responsibility for commissioning and managing long COVID services. Patients (individuals with lived experience of the condition) will form a working group to provide strategic direction to the work of the society. Patients will also work with professionals and academics in promoting research and further our understanding of the condition.

Given the overlap of long COVID with other similar chronic conditions such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgic Encephalitis and Fibromyalgia, we expect the society will be of interest to clinicians managing these related conditions. Clinicians working in the wider field of other post-viral conditions will also be interested in bringing their years of expertise to this society to share knowledge and develop effective management strategies for these conditions. The society, even though will attract UK clinicians to start with, will be open to an international audience and will aim to become a global community of clinicians in this field.

Every major viral outbreak so far (such SARS, MERS, and Ebola) has left many individuals with persistent long-term symptoms³ which have been poorly understood so far, inappropriately managed, ignored by many professionals, and affected individuals subjected to stigma, disbelief and gaslighting. The functional outcomes in those who have developed a long-term condition have been poor and have led to a significant burden on personal life, family and vocation. The financial burden to the country is huge from productivity loss and caregiver costs. The new professional society will hopefully also try to understand these longer-term societal issues and undertake advocacy work for the validation of the condition and investment in long-term care.

Our understanding of post-viral syndromes increases with every pandemic and we have made significant strides in the



management of long COVID, even though we are yet to identify a single unifying biomarker yet. This new society will help accumulate evidence from the current and previous pandemics to consolidate the knowledge base and prepare us better for the next pandemic. In an ideal scenario, we could be implementing effective clinical interventions faster during future pandemics that hopefully improves overall outcomes and leaves fewer individuals with long-term disability. The much-needed approach of 3 Rs—Recognition, Rehabilitation, and Research – will be the emphasis of this new professional society.⁴

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