

4.18 Respiratory Symptoms at the Long COVID clinic: Are Further Investigations Required?

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Background: The HSE ‘Model of Care for Long COVID’ defines Long COVID as symptoms beyond 12 weeks (1). It is associated with a myriad of symptoms affecting multiple systems, including respiratory. We analysed the prevalence of respiratory symptoms and objective findings in patients attending the combined COVID clinic (ran by both respiratory and infectious disease clinicians).

Methods: A retrospective audit of new patients attending the Long COVID clinic from November 2022 to February 2023 was completed. We assessed time to referral from index infection; nature of symptoms; investigations performed, including lung function tests and imaging; inhaler therapy; and subsequent referral to respiratory or sleep specialist services.

Results: 113 new patient attendances were reviewed. On average, referrals to the Long COVID clinic were made 8 months following the index COVID-19 infection. 53% (n=60) had respiratory symptoms, predominantly dyspnoea, cough, wheeze or combination on their initial visit. Only 24/60 patients had a CXR prior to their visit, with 24% (n=6) showing abnormalities. Follow-up imaging was normal in 50% of these cases. 23% (n=26) had preexisting lung conditions, with asthma being the most common. PFT’s were completed in 50% of patients with respiratory symptoms. 92% of PFT’s carried out were normal. Inhaler therapy was commenced in 8% (n=9), and 11% (n=12) were referred on to a specialist respiratory clinic, 5/12 having previously been known to respiratory services. 48% (n=55) of patients underwent Nijmegen screening tool. 45% out of these scored ≥ 23 , indicating a potential dysfunctional breathing pattern. In this cohort, 64% presented with dyspnoea initially.

Conclusion: Although more than half of the patients are presenting with respiratory symptoms, the majority have normal CXR and PFT findings. As the model of care for Long COVID evolves, a more holistic person-centred approach is important.

Reference:

1. *HSE Model of Care for Long Covid service (2021)*

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest