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WHAT WAS THE STUDY ABOUT?

NHS Scotland looked at who is using our Long COVID services and their health problems. Where possible, the study also followed progress of patients seen by Long COVID services over a short time. Given the short follow-up, it is hoped the study can be repeated in one year. This may provide us with more information on how long COVID services may be impacting patient's outcomes.

HOW DID THEY DO IT?

They collected data from patients using Long COVID services using an app called ELAROS.

WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?

Who uses Long COVID services?

- 701 patients from across Scotland entered information into the app.
- The average age was 52 years.
- There were twice as many women as men.
- Most patients were White (65%), 2.2% were Asian or mixed, and a third did not report their ethnicity. No patients recorded their ethnicity as Black.

Experience of people using Long COVID services

- Patients who entered data on the app reported many new health problems after COVID-19 that greatly affected their daily lives.
- 70% of these patients had work problems, needing sick leave, fewer hours, or job changes. Only 14% kept their previous work role without changes.
- They reported that they got somewhat better in symptoms and abilities over the first 6 months. Despite improvements, many reported that they still had major health issues compared to before having COVID.

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE LIMITATIONS?

- Patients reported their own data, which can introduce biases.
- Not all Long COVID patients seen by services used the app or continued to use it for future assessments.
- Not all patients in the study had Long COVID; some had other health problems.
- Due to variation in service pathways, data were collected at different frequencies from Long COVID patients
- Some patients were on waiting lists, while others were just about to have appointments. This makes it hard to tell if the Long COVID services helped them get better.
- The study was unable to compare different types of service provision or models of care.

WHAT DID THE STUDY RECOMMEND?

For the NHS

- Long COVID should be treated as a long-term condition that needs ongoing care, similar to other chronic illnesses.
- Long COVID has a significant impact on people's working lives. Long
 COVID services should identify appropriate support for patients to enable them to return to work.

Future work

- Continuing to fund and support research is important to better understand Long COVID and find effective treatments.
- Repeating this analysis in 6-12 months and using other sources of data about services will help us to better assess the ongoing impact of Long COVID services on patient outcomes.
- Plans to undertake any future data collection and analyses from long COVID services should ensure involvement of patient representatives from the outset.

For Long COVID Patients

 If you have ongoing health problems after a COVID-19 infection, seek medical care. Start by visiting your GP. If needed, your GP can refer you to specialist services for further care and support.

Where can I find the full report?

The full report is available on the Long Covid Service website: NHS Scotland Service
Evaluation of Long-COVID Services.