LONG COVID UPDATE FOR PRIMARY CARE

Covid-19 and long covid highlight the need to tackle behavioural health challenges

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Greenhalgh and colleagues’ Practice Pointer and the Opinion article from Long Covid SOS serve as a reminder that “there is no health without mental health.”

Behavioural health conditions—including mental health conditions and substance use disorders, which often co-occur—have been among the most visible and widespread of covid-19’s effects. Throughout the pandemic, patients with behavioural health conditions were among those facing heightened risks of adverse outcomes relative to the general population. Covid-19 has exacerbated barriers for those whose behavioural health conditions preceded the pandemic, and confronted individuals and communities with challenges that have likely contributed to increased incidence of these conditions.

Supporting those with new or exacerbated behavioural health conditions is an essential element of efforts to help patients with long term impacts of covid-19. Greenhalgh and colleagues specifically note “mental health and wellbeing” as a key component of primary care in assessing and treating patients with long covid. Screening for and identifying potential substance use disorders, co-occurring with mental health conditions or separate, also is important.

The US Department of Health and Human Services renewed its public health emergency declaration for the opioid crisis, initially declared in October 2017, in January 2020, one week before the country’s first declaration of emergency for covid-19. In August 2022, the federal government published two reports on long covid. These plans note the importance of behavioural health in efforts to support those with long term complications of covid-19.

Ensuring well funded, sustainable, and adequately staffed behavioural health services at all levels of government and within the private and philanthropic sectors is among the most essential lessons we can learn from covid-19.

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Full response at: www.bmj.com/content/378/bmj-2022-072117/rr.

2 Members of Long Covid SOS. The needs of patients with long covid must not be ignored. BMJ 2022:378: doi: 10.1136/bmj.c2287 pmid: 36303758