

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) Occupational Health Department

Supporting staff in the NHS with Long Covid

1) Initial identification of NHS staff with Long Covid and development of a Long Covid service

The Occupational Health department at County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) identified that there were a significant number of staff who were struggling to return to work following an acute Covid 19 infection. Many of these staff had relapsing remitting symptoms persisting for months after the initial infection. Some staff returned to work, but subsequently required more absence due to relapsing symptoms, others struggled to return to work at all.

Within the trust a collaborative group met in November 2020 to identify how a 'Long Covid' service could be delivered. This group included an Occupational health physician, two GPs, a Respiratory consultant, an ITU consultant and a Psychiatrist. Collectively we identified that patients suffering from Long Covid had needs involving all our specialities and that supporting and managing this condition would involve a multidisciplinary team approach.

As the occupational health service had already identified many staff with ongoing symptoms, a pilot Long Covid service involving 20 members of CDDFT staff was designed.

The collaboration of different hospital specialities and primary care, lead to the development of an innovative, multidisciplinary service which commenced on 12th January 2021. We were one of the first clinics in the region and ran our staff pilot group for the first 4 weeks. Offering NHS staff early access to this service, promoted the caring, supportive ethos of our trust whilst supporting staff recovery and return to work.

2) On-going support for NHS staff with Long Covid

Our commitment at CDDFT Occupational Health department is to support all NHS staff who have been affected by the recent pandemic.

The Occupational Health team had a key role identifying early cases for the pilot Long Covid service and collaborated with other specialities in the development of the service.

Within our occupational health team we have a number of ways in which we provide ongoing support for our staff struggling with the symptoms of Long Covid:

- **Self help websites**- We have collected a large number of self-help websites to support our staff. This includes general Long Covid advice, anosmia, fatigue, breathlessness, nutrition, mental health, post ICU recovery, social and financial support, faith and ethnic organisation websites. (see Appendix 1 below)
- **Return to work guidance** we deliver during our conversations with staff. We also direct people to several good You Tube videos which have been developed by Derby hospitals Physio/OT team

Managing Covid related symptoms during sickness absence:

<https://youtu.be/3fHeLbDo40U>

Return to work rehabilitation:

<https://youtu.be/29KcxHJb4qU>

Managing ongoing covid related symptoms in the workplace:

<https://youtu.be/JNUBmWJqFms>

Supporting staff with ongoing covid related symptoms to return to work: advice for managers:

<https://youtu.be/bryRdjIzqRM>

- In addition we provide return to work guidance through the **SOM website**:

<https://www.som.org.uk/covid-19-return-work-guide-recovering-workers> - Support for workers returning to the workplace post covid

<https://www.som.org.uk/covid-19-return-work-guide-managers> - Advice for managers supporting staff returning to work post covid

- For staff with on-going symptoms that remain troublesome, we advise them to see their GP for a series of investigations to rule out other illnesses, before onward referral to our local Long Covid service.
- We have designed a letter to send to the Long Covid service (with the staff member's consent) so that the service is able to keep track of the number of NHS staff struggling with Long Covid (see Appendix 2 below)

Appendix 1

General Long Covid recovery sites:

- <https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk> - NHS site to support covid recovery
- Homerton University Hospital. ACERS: Post COVID-19 patient information pack. <https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Post-COVID-19-information-pack-5.pdf> Resource with help on managing breathlessness, cough, fatigue, diet, physical activity and emotional impact of long covid
- Health Education England site with links to resources for managing Long Covid
<https://library.nhs.uk/long-covid/>
- support for older people
<https://library.nhs.uk/coronavirus-resources/older-people/>

Return to work guidance:

- <https://www.som.org.uk/covid-19-return-work-guide-recovering-workers> - Support for workers returning to the workplace post covid
- <https://www.som.org.uk/covid-19-return-work-guide-managers> - Advice for managers supporting staff returning to work post covid
- Short videos created by OT/Physio team in Derby. Can be really helpful for patients around work.

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Support for anosmia:

- <https://www.fifthsense.org.uk/smell-training/> support for people with smell and taste disorders
- <https://abscent.org/nosewell> -smell training

Managing Fatigue:

- <https://covid19-recovery.org/deal/managing-fatigue-cresta-clinic-awrc/> Newcastle NHS site on managing fatigue
- <https://www.rcot.co.uk/recovering-covid-19-post-viral-fatigue-and-conserving-energy> Royal college occupational therapy site for managing fatigue post covid
- <https://movingmedicine.ac.uk/covidrecovery/>: benefits of being kind to yourself and moving exercises
- <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/333287/WHO-EURO-2020-855-40590-54571-eng.pdf> : WHO rehabilitation self management following covid

Breathlessness:

- Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation. Post-COVID HUB. <https://www.post-covid.org.uk/>
- [Resources for treatment of breathing pattern disorders](https://www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk/)
<https://www.physiotherapyforbpd.org.uk/>

Nutrition:

- British Dietetic association -nutritional advice regarding coronavirus <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/covid-19-corona-virus-advice-for-the-general-public.html>
- NHS Change for Life – general dietary advice <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life>

Post ICU Recovery:

- ICU Steps: the intensive care support charity. <https://www.icusteps.org>

Mental health:

- Mindfulness exercises and tips. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/mindfulness/mindfulness-exercises-tips/>
- Living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty. <https://www.psychologytools.com/articles/free-guide-to-living-with-worry-and-anxiety-amidst-global-uncertainty/>

- Mental Health Foundation. How to look after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus>
- Mind. Coronavirus and your mental health. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/>

Social and financial support:

- Citizens Advice Bureau. Helping people through the COVID-19 pandemic. <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/coronavirus-if-youre-worried-about-working/>
- Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS). Coronavirus (COVID-19): advice for employers and employees. <https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>
- Carers UK. Coronavirus guidance. <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19>
- Social Care Institute for Excellence. Supporting people who are isolated or at risk during the COVID-19 crisis. <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/support-for-isolated>

Faith organisations:

- Church of England coronavirus and faith <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>
- methodist coronavirus site <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/coronavirus/>
- Catholic coronavirus site <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/health-social-care/coronavirus-guidelines/>
- Sikh Helpline. Coronavirus update. <https://www.sikhhelpline.com/coronavirus/>
- Jewish Care. Online and local resource library. <https://www.jewishcare.org/informationduringcovid>
- Muslim Council of Britain. COVID-19 guidance for Muslim communities. <https://mcb.org.uk/resources/coronavirus/>

Ethnic organisations:

- Ubele. COVID-19 resource page for African diaspora communities. <https://www.ubele.org/>
- Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation. Support and resources for BAME Communities. <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/Coronavirus/BAMESupport>

APPENDIX 2- letter from occupational health to the Long Covid service

RE:
DOB
Job:
Place of work:

Dear Long Covid service

Our commitment at CDDFT Occupational Health department is to support all NHS staff who have been affected by the recent pandemic.

This NHS employee has been assessed by our Occupational Health department.

EITHER

They have symptoms suggestive of Long Covid, have been assessed by their GP, and referred to your service.

This letter is to allow the Long Covid team to track NHS staff referrals to the service.

OR

They have symptoms suggestive of Long Covid and I have therefore asked them to see their GP for the appropriate investigations, before consideration of a referral to your service.

This is NOT a referral in itself to your service

The member of staff (copied in to this letter) will contact their GP to arrange the appropriate investigations and assessment of their symptoms.

We kindly ask that the GP (also copied in) will then assess whether a referral to the Long Covid service is appropriate.

Yours sincerely

Cc Email to client

Cc Client's GP