Telehealth rehabilitation for the management of Long Covid symptoms

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Introduction

There is a paucity of interventional studies evaluating the management of individuals with Long Covid. Guidelines recommend a multidisciplinary (MDT) approach to rehabilitation including self management support. The HSE has identified the need to deliver as much rehabilitation care as possible in the community, and so a virtual program was developed as a means to provide treatment for Long Covid patients remotely.

Aim

To assess the impact of an Occupational Therapy (OT) and Physiotherapy (PT) led virtual rehabilitation program on symptoms of Long Covid.

Participants

Recruitment took place at the University Hospital Galway Post Covid Clinic between July and August 2021. Patients were considered eligible after MDT assessment, a clinical case definition of Long Covid, and access to an internet capable device.

Methods

OT and PT developed a pilot telehealth program consisting of four one-hour virtual group sessions delivered weekly over four weeks. Content was informed by available clinical management recommendations.

Outcome measurements completed before and after the program included the Modified Fatigue Impact Scale, Montreal Cognitive Assessment (blind), Canadian Occupational Performance Measure, Nijmegen Questionnaire, Generalised Anxiety and Depression Scale, and brief De Paul Symptom Questionnaire.

42 patients invited to participate

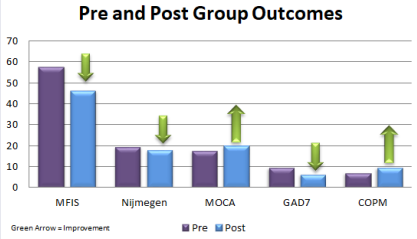
Fig. 1 Group Content

Results

20 participants commenced the intervention. The most commonly identified symptoms were fatigue (85%, n=17), followed by cognitive dysfunction (80%, n=16), issues with mood (60%, n=12), sleep disturbance (55%, n=11) and breathing pattern disorders (25%, n=5).

A goal of return to work or phased increase in hours of work was identified for 70% (n=14) and Post Exertional Malaise (PEM) was observed in 85% (n=17). Therefore, graded exercise was not included in the program.

19 participants completed the program. The mean changes were: (i) total MFIS -11.1±3.4 (p=0.005); (ii) NQ - 1.5±1.7 (p=0.38); (iii) MOCA +2.2±1.3 (p<0.001); (iv) GAD 7 -2.7±1.0 (p=0.02); (v) total COPM 2.5±0.9 (p=0.01)



Discussion

Participants in this group exhibited debilitating symptoms prior to participating, with significant effects on activities and participation. Our intervention demonstrates statistically significant improvements in fatigue (reduced MFIS), breathing pattern disorders (reduced NQ), cognitive function (increased MOCA), mood (reduced GAD7) and occupational performance (increased COPM).

This highlights the importance and potential utility and impact of supported rehabilitation programs for individuals with Long Covid.

Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy are optimally skilled to deliver these interventions.

References

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