

Supporting Health Care Workers with Long COVID

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Occ health clinic at Middlemore

- Initial 1h review
- Understand symptoms, general health, specifics of role, home demands and supports, relationship with manager, what aspects of work worry them, safety aspect, mental health and coping
- Return to work plan (when ready)
- Regular follow-up – 2 weekly initially; updated advice following each review

What to expect

- You are not alone
- Symptoms fluctuate
- Pacing and rest - necessary right now
- Expect energy crashes but try to avoid them – learning curve
- You are not going crazy, its brain fog
- Need to prioritise your health and recovery - not the time to be a martyr

What to expect – for managers

- Increasing hours or duties too quickly will be counter-productive
- People put a lot of pressure on themselves
 - Reassure them
- Symptoms fluctuate. Need to be extra flexible on bad days
- Everyone is different, don't compare

Energy thieves

- Not just physical exertion
- Also cognitive and social energy expenditure
- Working from home (where possible) can help reduce the total burden of energy expenditure
- Reduced hours, reduced duties and responsibilities while fatigue/brain fog is prominent

Specific RTW guidance helps

- Example recommendations:
 - Work 3 x 5h days, morning shifts only
 - Work from home 1 day per week - attend meetings via zoom
 - Avoid weekly MDT meeting (temporarily) as overly demanding given current symptoms
 - Assist with established clients only (not new)
 - Flexibility to take regular short breaks/finish early when needed
 - Review in 2 weeks, with updated recommendations to follow

Lived experience 1

- I was blessed - boss assured me I had a job and knew I was working on recovery and to take time to heal - took a lot of stress off
- You long to be at work and beat yourself up daily about letting anyone down. In a normal situation you would push through and go to work but with long covid you physically cannot.
- If you do try do something beyond your level you can feel awful afterwards for days.

Lived experience 2

- Supportive manager makes huge difference
- decision making is hard when you are unwell – helpful to have someone providing guidance about work, who has your best interests at heart and can view things objectively

Lived experience 3

- Prioritize – the house may not be tidy, you may not have worked your usual hours, but this is ok for now
- Have small daily goals. You can build from there over time
- Keep track of your progress, often it is so gradual we don't notice it

Lived experience 4

- Watch your self talk
- Avoid alcohol, highly processed foods
- Take a break **before** you become shattered – pacing is so important.
- Scrolling social media is not a real break

Lived experience 5

- Small wins add up over time
- Compare to how you were at the start of having long COVID not how you were before long COVID.
- Have a good network of people to vent to when you get frustrated.
- For managers: long COVID may not be visible so please ask how affected your staff member is and how you can assist and support them.

Thank-you

- To my lovely patients who shared their helpful advice
- To everyone involved in today's event
- To health care workers for everything you do for our communities