

# OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY FOR LONG COVID

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&

INVITED GUEST OF LCAI 27/03/23



## INTRODUCTION

- **Occupational Therapist (OT)** of over twenty years experience
- Main clinical experience in the area of **neuro-rehabilitation** and older persons rehabilitation, with a particular interest in **cognition (thinking skills), fatigue, and hidden disability**
- **Clinical Guidelines, policy**
- Currently work with the HSE National Clinical Programme for Stroke – **HSCP Lead**. Galway University Hospitals up to Dec 2022
- Speaking tonight as **invited guest of LCAI**
- **AOTI rep** to HSE Post-Covid and Long-Covid Working Group

# LONG COVID

Patient-derived umbrella term that encompasses symptoms that may be experienced after the acute episode of SARS-Cov-19.

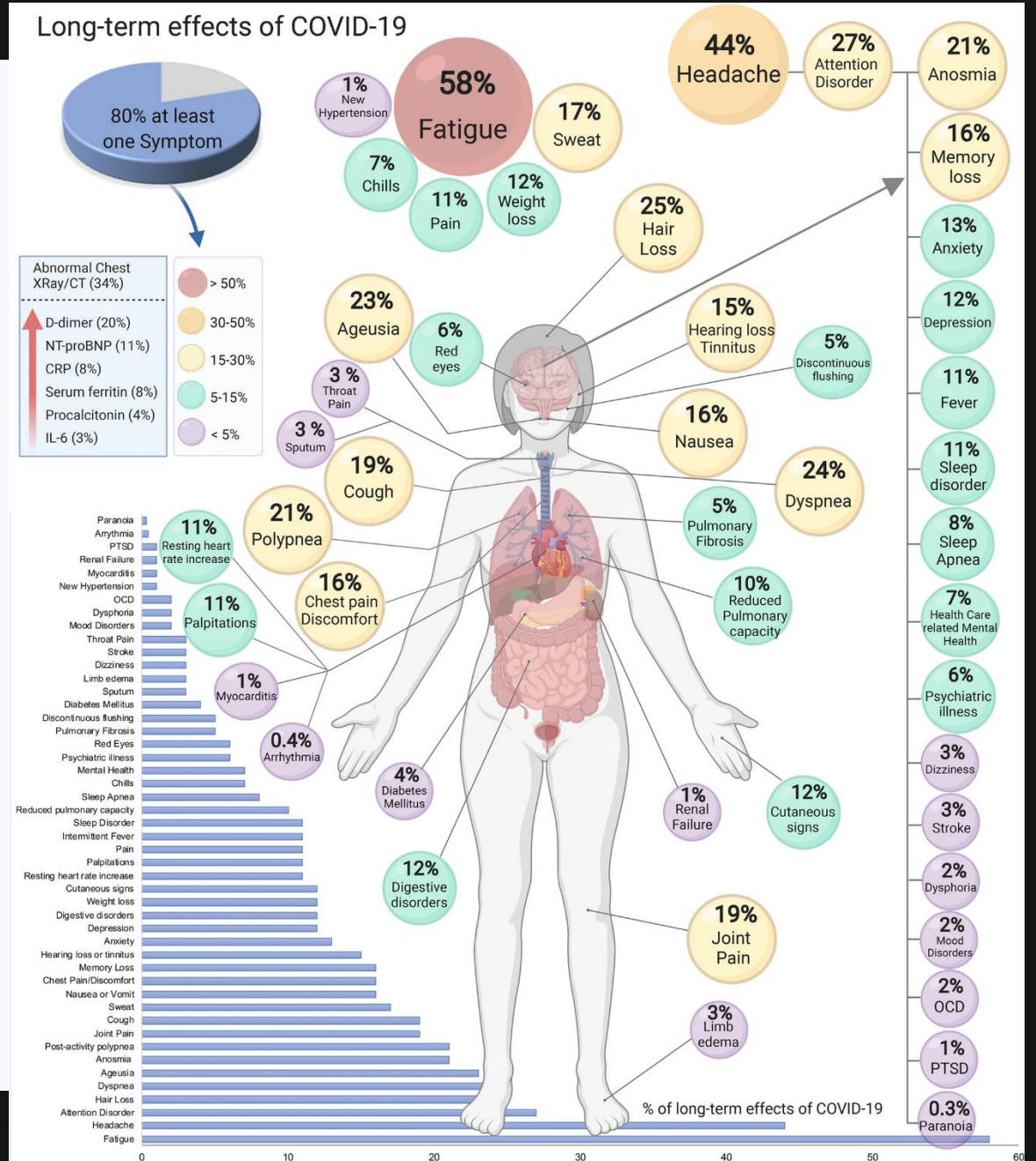
Exact figures in Ireland are unknown – FADA study underway at present. Significant impact for people affected, families, society, workforce.....

Complex and overlapping symptom profile.

The broad scope of Occupational Therapy means that not only can we address these issues individually, but that we can also explore **inter-dependencies**

(Ref: Lopez-leon, S., Wegman-ostrosky, T., Perelman, C. *Et al.* More than 50 long-term effects of COVID-19: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Sci rep* 11, 16144(2021).)

## Long-term effects of COVID-19



# IRISH CONTEXT

A great **first half?**

Ireland as a nation **successfully navigated** the waters early in the pandemic.

- highly successful vaccination programme
- public health messaging
- phenomenal response from healthcare workers, our leaders and the general public.

How we address the issues that Long Covid presents will determine the **true legacy**.

We must **mitigate against preventable loss of health**, and address **impacts** in daily living, productivity and quality of life



# OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

OTs are **clinical experts** at assessing how different health conditions can affect an individual's abilities to do what they want to do, or need to do, in their daily lives.

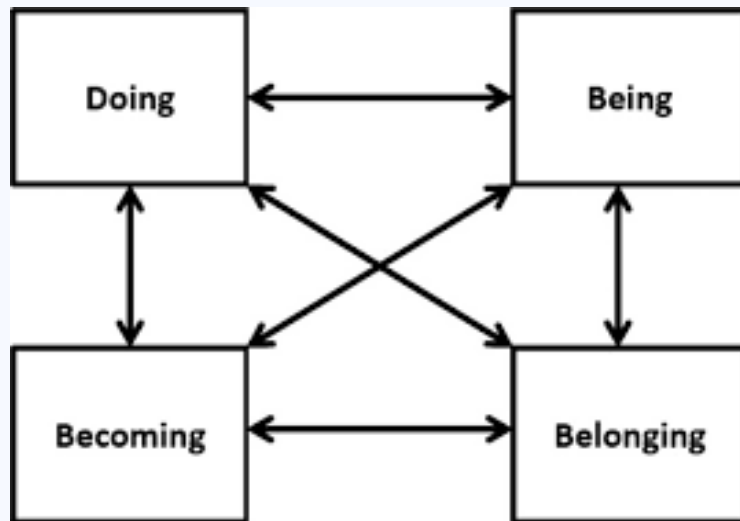
**Dual-trained in physical and mental health**, with a comprehensive and wide reaching skillset including assessment and intervention in many key areas relevant to Long Covid, including cognition, impact on daily living, mood, work, environmental adaptations and more

No OT in the HSE Post-Acute clinics (4-12 weeks post-infection, Respired). 4 out of the 6 Long Covid clinics have OT input and a 5<sup>th</sup> is currently piloting a service.

Adult OT services are also available via primary care, private providers, hospital settings, older persons services, disability services



## Long Covid Profoundly Disrupts Our Occupations



- Self-care
- Resting & Sleeping
- School
- Driving
- Parenting
- Sexual expression
- Socialising
- Work
- Political activity
- Saving the planet
- .....whatever it is to you



Pacing

Planning

4Ps

Prioritising

Positioning

## ENERGY CONSERVATION

- Learning how to “spend” your energy
- Aims to enable people to get the most out of their energy without triggering symptom exacerbation
- Time Use, Tempo and Temporality
- It is really challenging to do..... but done well reduces symptom burden and gives you back time in your day – less time recovering

# GET TO KNOW YOUR OWN LEVELS

Work out your baseline (activity diary)

- Where do you spend your energy (*physical, cognitive, social*).
- Can you see predictable patterns of boom and bust?
- Can you aim for predictable patterns/routines

Challenges with Long Covid are overlapping symptoms and Post Exertional Malaise / PESE



# PACING

- Essentially concerns Activity – Rest balance
- Time-based pacing one example – rest for X times as long as the activity
- Taking breaks and microbreaks within tasks – “chunking”

## Problem Solving

### 1. Tempo

- Who is controlling the tempo?
- External factors, e.g. the workplace

### 2. Symptoms guide activity – no progressive increments

- “Pacing” as a term now being used in ways that does NOT relate to energy conservation. GET in disguise?

### 3. “Chunk” too big – hit PEM. Boom and bust

### 4. Sometimes the wrong strategy – eg cognition

## PRIORITISING

- Time-use : What matters to you?
- Making choices about where to spend your energy
- You may be surprised where it is going

### Problem Solving

1. Change, adjustment and grief
2. Your priorities may not be what others see as priorities
3. External factors beyond control – financial, family. work

# PLANNING

Temporal factors

Identifying a course of action for a given situation – activity modification

Externalise the plan

Where can I use a “hack” or a simplification?

Great strategy for brain fog in particular

Emergency planning – e.g. PEM crash emoji

## Problem Solving

1. Planning in itself takes energy, especially cognitive
2. Not everything is foreseeable
3. Snowball effect & Optimism bias!

## POSITIONING

- Energy demands change according to body position
- For people with POTS in particular this is a key energy conservation approach
- Physical AND cognitive benefits

### Problem Solving

1. Again change – I can do it so I should do it
2. May need equipment, space, layout changes
3. External factors around the right way to do things

# ACTIVITY MODIFICATION (E.G. SHOWERING)

Fluffy  
towelling robe

Do body and  
hair on  
separate days

Do I need to  
shower?

Dry  
shampoo,  
foaming wipes

What else is  
happening  
today?

Have items  
within reach

Is it a good  
idea today?

Temperature

Bath Vs  
Shower

Hair basins



Seated Position





## REST & SLEEP

Could do a whole hour on this alone!

Although you can feel very tired, it can be hard to sleep and paradoxically when you need it most sleep can be most disrupted.

Fatigue is absolutely not a lack of sleep, but the two can combine to make things very difficult so supporting sleep and rest is a key role for OTs (non-pharmacological)

Resting is not just about sleeping. It is about disengaging from activities that require energy, so can include total rest but also sometimes it can include low energy activities



# NAPS

Not all naps are created equal, but they get a bad rap!

By understanding the role of napping, you can learn to take effective naps that support your body's internal clock and maintain your energy level throughout the day.

Timing is everything, but naps are neither good nor bad.

## Types of Naps

1. Recovery Nap – post-activity
2. Prophylactic Nap – in advance of activity
3. Appetitive Nap – for fun
4. Fulfillment Nap – to make up sleep needs
5. Essential Nap – illness / recovery





Thanks to you all for listening  
Thanks especially to LCAI, Kirsty Stanley and the Long Covid Community worldwide