

Dr Dai Lloyd MS
Chair, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
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24 March 2020

Dear Dr Lloyd

Additional Evidence from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society submitted to the Welsh Parliament Health, Social Care and Sport Committee inquiry into the Covid-19 outbreak on health and social care in Wales: Post-Covid Syndrome

We welcome the opportunity to contribute additional evidence to the Committee's ongoing inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic and to focus specifically on Post Covid Syndrome (Long Covid).

We recognise the impact that COVID-19 is having on individuals and that recovery from the virus will differ from person to person. We are also cognisant that understanding the impact of covid-19 and the full effects of Post Covid Syndrome is at an early stage and that further research and evidence is essential to find effective solutions in its management across the health and social care system . We are pleased that the new Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre became operational on 1 March. Its role in analysing the impact of coronavirus and supporting evidence-based decisions to support people with their recovery from the virus will be imperative.

We understand that Post Covid Syndrome will affect people in both physical and psychological ways. In all cases we are clear that that pharmacists can play an important role alongside other health and social care professionals in supporting people's recovery from the virus. As part of a co-ordinated, multi-agency and multi-professional, integrated approach, pharmacists should have a key role in supporting the health of those impacted upon by the pandemic.

We are pleased to see early steps being taken at a Health Board level in developing a pathway approach for Post Covid Syndrome. When medicines are used as part of recovery treatment plans, we would expect the pharmacy profession's expertise to be included as part of the pathway.

Identifying the signs of Post Covid Syndrome will be critical going forward and pharmacists in primary and community settings will play an important role in this as time goes on. We would expect pharmacists and their teams to be alert to any signs of Post Covid Syndrome and to use their professional judgment to take appropriate action. This must be supported by training and education as well as clear, evidence-based information about the signs, treatment and management of Post Covid Syndrome.

Referral to local services as part of a Post Covid Syndrome pathway will be important actions that pharmacists can take. However, at present, pharmacists' role in signposting and referral is typically informal and relies upon individual pharmacists, their knowledge of local services and personal

relationships with local GPs and other health and social care teams. A more robust, structured and direct referral system will be needed to allow pharmacists to refer into the Post Covid Syndrome pathway and facilitate early access to the most appropriate service for the individual.

As part of their professional responsibility we would expect pharmacists to keep up to date with local and national service developments and pathway design in order to signpost or refer anyone who they have identified may benefit from those services.

Communication between the multi-professional teams involved in the Post Covid Syndrome pathway will be critical in facilitating efficient and effective treatment and management. All pharmacists directly involved in patient care as part of the pathway must have access to IT systems that are interoperable with other primary care IT systems. This would include read and write access to a full and integrated electronic patient record, to allow pharmacists to fully support patients with the medication aspects of the personal treatment plan.

Developing the knowledge, skills and confidence to effectively manage the challenges of Post Covid Syndrome and the ongoing consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic will be imperative for all health professionals, including pharmacists in primary, community and hospital settings. Protected learning to support the development of knowledge and skills to manage and understand Post Covid Syndrome will be vital for the multidisciplinary health team.

Finally we believe that the development of Post Covid Syndrome pathways should not disadvantage any individual based on where they access services in Wales. Consistency in service delivery will be essential to ensure equitable access to services in every part of Wales.

Recommendations

To harness the skills of the pharmacy profession in the treatment and management of individuals with Post Covid Syndrome we recommend:

- The clinical skills of pharmacists and their expertise in medicines management should be harnessed and integrated appropriately into care pathways for Post Covid Syndrome.
- Pharmacists should be empowered to increase and accelerate access to the right services as part of the Post Covid Syndrome pathway.
- Formal referral systems should enable pharmacists to directly refer patients that require treatment for Post Covid Syndrome to appropriate health professional colleagues.
- Protected time should be in place for all pharmacists to learn new skills and update their knowledge as part of a multidisciplinary team to support individuals with Post Covid Syndrome.

I trust this additional information is helpful to the Committee in outlining the role that pharmacists can play in the treatment and management of Post Covid Syndrome. We would be pleased to elaborate on any key points should the Committee have any queries.

Yours sincerely



Elen Jones
RPS, Director for Wales