



MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL

DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE



HARVARD
MEDICAL SCHOOL

Post-COVID Syndromes: Lessons Learned and New Frontiers

MGH/HMS Internal Medicine Course
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Disclosures

Stock: Verve Therapeutics

Patents: Anti-NEDD9 antibody (US Patent ID# PCT/US2019/059890), Plasma NEDD9 ELISA (US Patent ID# PCT/US2020/066886)

All disclosures are unrelated to the content of this presentation

Learning objectives

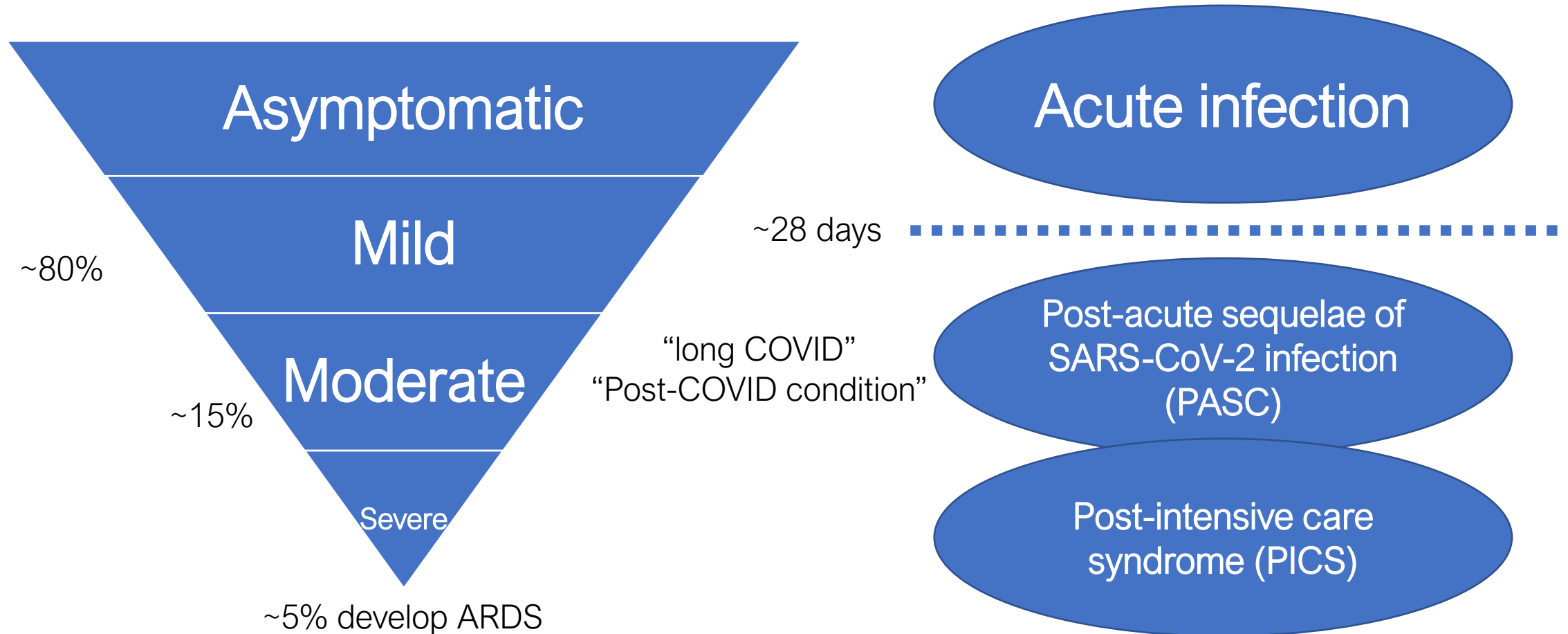
Understand the spectrum of SARS-CoV-2 illness and recovery in adults

Define the post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC)

Understand the current research into PASC pathophysiology

Outline a clinical approach to the adult patient presenting with PASC

The SARS-CoV-2 spectrum of illness and recovery



Post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection (PASC)

Acute SARS-CoV-2 infection

Post COVID-19 Condition

“long COVID”
“PASC”

WHO Clinical Case Definition:

- Probable or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection
- New or persistent symptoms **12 weeks** from onset of initial symptoms (>2 mo. duration)
- Symptoms may fluctuate or relapse
- Cannot be explained by another diagnosis

U09.9 Post-COVID Condition, Unspecified

Spectrum and epidemiology of PASC

Constellation of Symptoms by Organ System



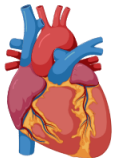
Fatigue, headaches, dysautonomia, cognitive impairment (“brain fog”)



Anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder



Dyspnea, decreased exercise capacity, cough



Palpitations, tachycardia, chest pain



Arthralgias

Epidemiology:

~13% \geq 1 month of symptoms

~4.5% \geq 2 months

~2.3% \geq 3 months

Risk factors:

- \uparrow age
- \uparrow BMI
- Female sex
- \geq 5 symptoms at onset
- \uparrow severity of index illness

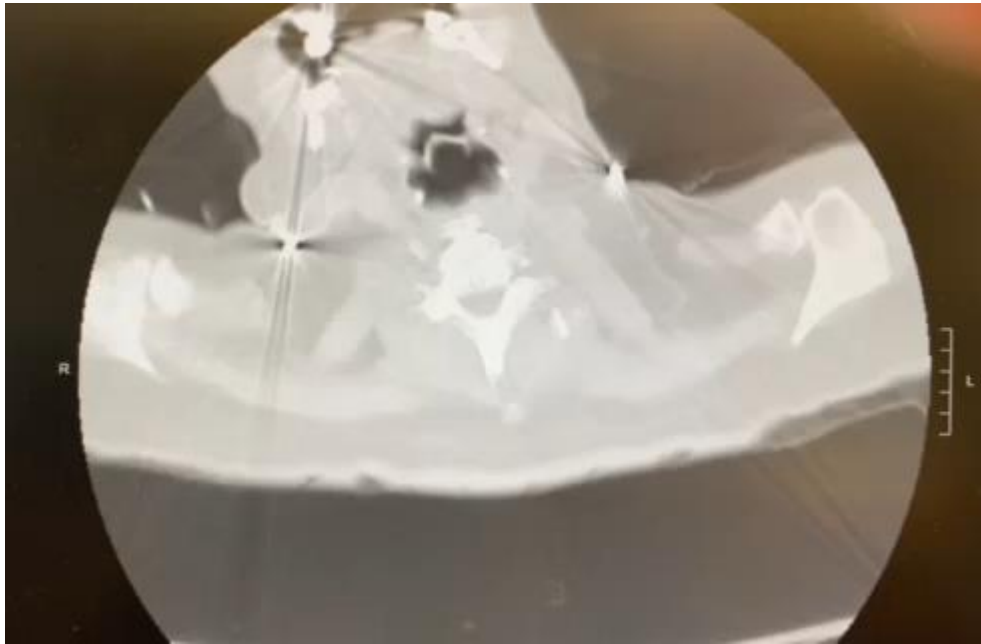
Case 1

46-year-old Latinx man with obesity and type 2 diabetes mellitus who works as a warehouse supervisor hospitalized with critical COVID-19 leading to acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) requiring intubation x 3 weeks.

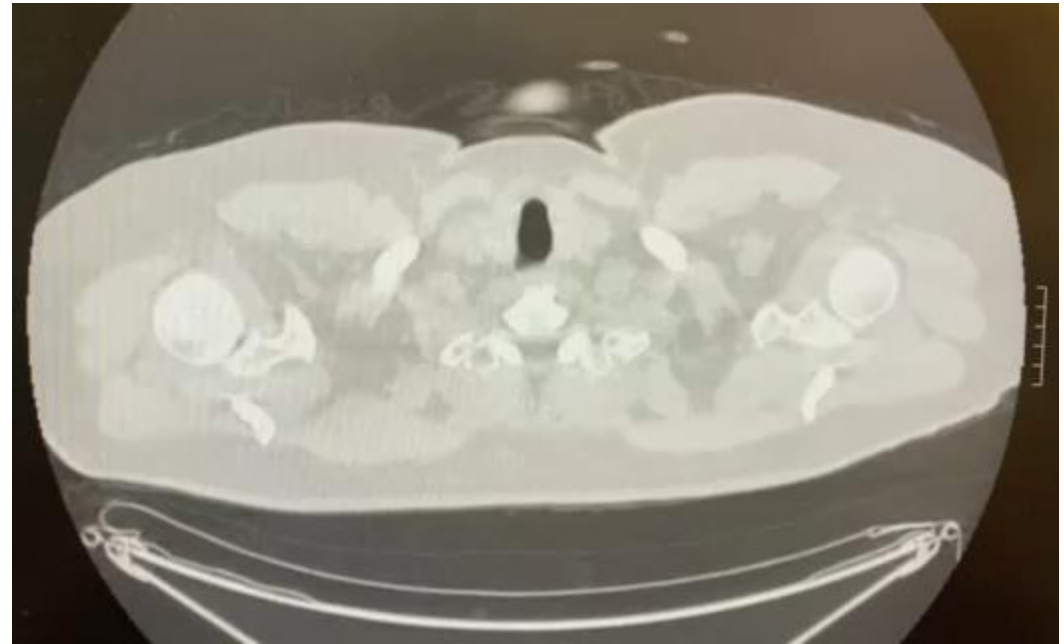
His hospital course was complicated by ventilator associated pneumonia, delirium, withdrawal from sedatives & analgesics, dysphagia, and a sacral decubitus ulcer.

At follow up with you he reports dyspnea on exertion, hypoxemia requiring supplemental oxygen, fatigue, tachycardia, short-term memory deficits, anxiety, and lower back and thigh pain.

Case 1





Index ICU admission for ARDS




4 months after discharge

Case 1

Spirometry at BTPS		ATS 	Pre Bronchodilator						
		Actual	Predicted	% Pred	LLN	ULN	ZScore		
FEV ₁	L	1.84	3.68	50	2.81	4.56	-3.56	A	S
FVC	L	2.17	4.74	46	3.64	5.84	-3.82	A	S
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	85	78	109	66	90	1.07	N	
FEF ₂₅₋₇₅	L/s	3.57	3.14	114	1.58	4.70	0.39		
PEFR	L/s	9.81	9.42	104	7.10	11.74	----		
FIVC	L	2.10	4.74	44	3.64	5.84	----		
FEF ₅₀ / FIF ₅₀		1.95	----	----	----	----	----		

Lung Volumes (He)		ATS 	Pre Bronchodilator					
		Actual	Predicted	% Pred	CI Range			
TLC	L	3.00	6.98	43	5.37	8.59	A	S
SVC	L	2.12	4.80	44	3.68	5.92		
FRC	L	1.55	3.62	43	2.16	5.07	A	m
ERV	L	0.67	1.43	47	----	----		
RV	L	0.88	2.18	40	1.42	2.94	A	M
RV/TLC	%	29	32	91	21	43	N	

Diffusion		ATS 	Pre Bronchodilator					
		Actual	Predicted	% Pred	CI Range			
DLCO	mL/min/mmHg	6.70	29.12	23	21.13	37.11		
DLCO [Hb]	mL/min/mmHg	7.36	29.12	25	21.13	37.11	A	S
Hb	g/dl	11.8	14.6	----	12.0	16.0		
VA [BTPS]	L	2.79	6.98	40	5.38	8.59		
DLCO/VA	mL/min/mmHg/L	2.63	4.67	56	3.47	5.87	A	m

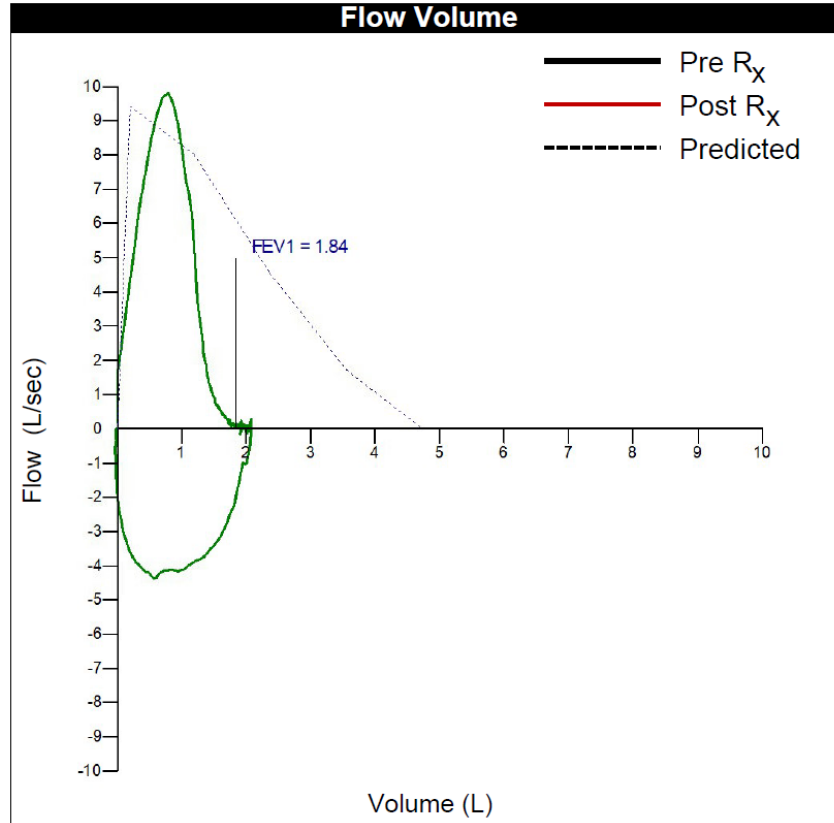
Normal FEV₁/FVC ratio
 ↓ FEV₁
 ↓ FVC
 Suggestive of severe restriction

↓ TLC consistent with restriction

D_LCO is severely impaired

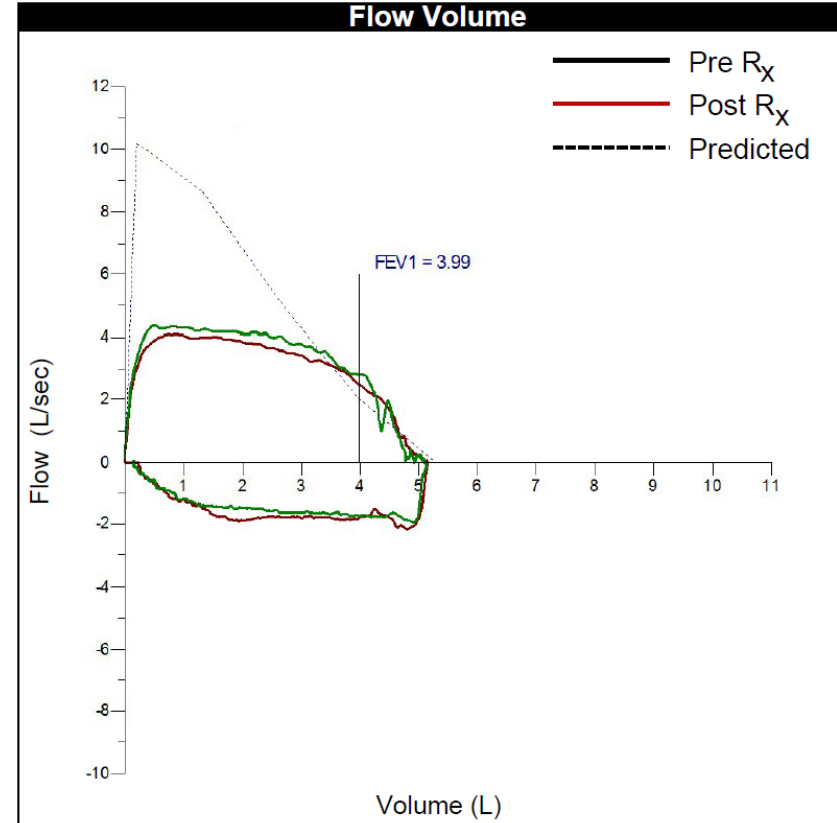
Case 1

Our patient's flow volume loop



Restricted flow-volume loop but otherwise normal contours

Another patient's flow volume loop



Tracheal (fixed) stenosis due following tracheostomy

Case 1

What is the most likely cause of this patient's shortness of breath?

- A) Persistent SARS-CoV-2 infection
- B) Organizing pneumonia
- C) Tracheal stenosis
- D) Deconditioning
- E) Pulmonary fibrotic sequelae of ARDS
- F) Both D and E

Case 1

What is the most likely cause of this patient's shortness of breath?

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- F) Both D and E

The patient is both deconditioned (due to ICU-acquired weakness) and has pulmonary parenchymal sequelae of ARDS on cross-sectional imaging with resultant restriction and impaired diffusing capacity

Post-Intensive Care Syndrome (PICS)

Post-intensive care syndrome (PICS)

New or worsened impairment in 1 or more of the following domains following an ICU stay and persisting past hospital discharge:

- Physical function
- Cognition
- Mental health

Risk factors for PICS include:

- Multiorgan dysfunction
- Mechanical ventilation
- Sedation
- Delirium
- Immobility
- Systemic steroids
- Hyperglycemia
- Isolation

Particularly relevant to COVID-19

* PICS can also affect family members (PICS-F)

Pulmonary Sequelae of Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS)

Parenchymal abnormalities after ARDS are common

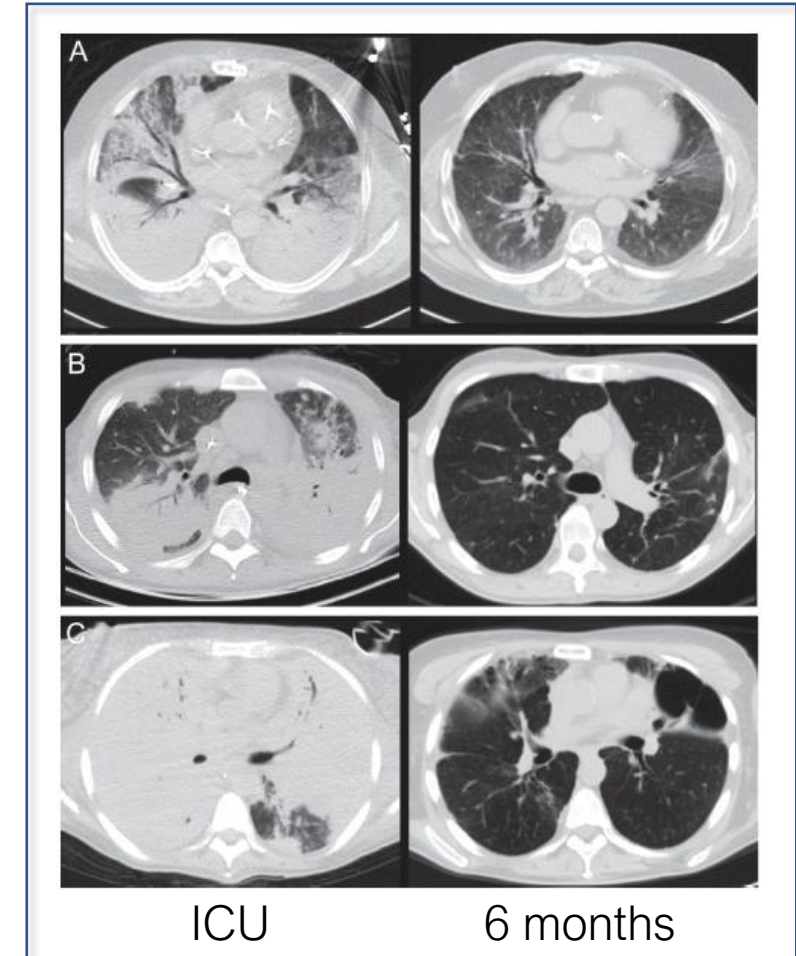
- 50% of patients have ↓ TLC at 1 year
- Impaired D_LCO on PFTs is the most common finding

Following the SARS-CoV-1 outbreak (2003):

- 41% had abnormal peak exercise capacity at 3 months
- 5% of patients had residual parenchymal findings at 15 years

Following the MERS-CoV outbreak (2012):

- 33% of patients had parenchymal fibrosis at 1 month follow up

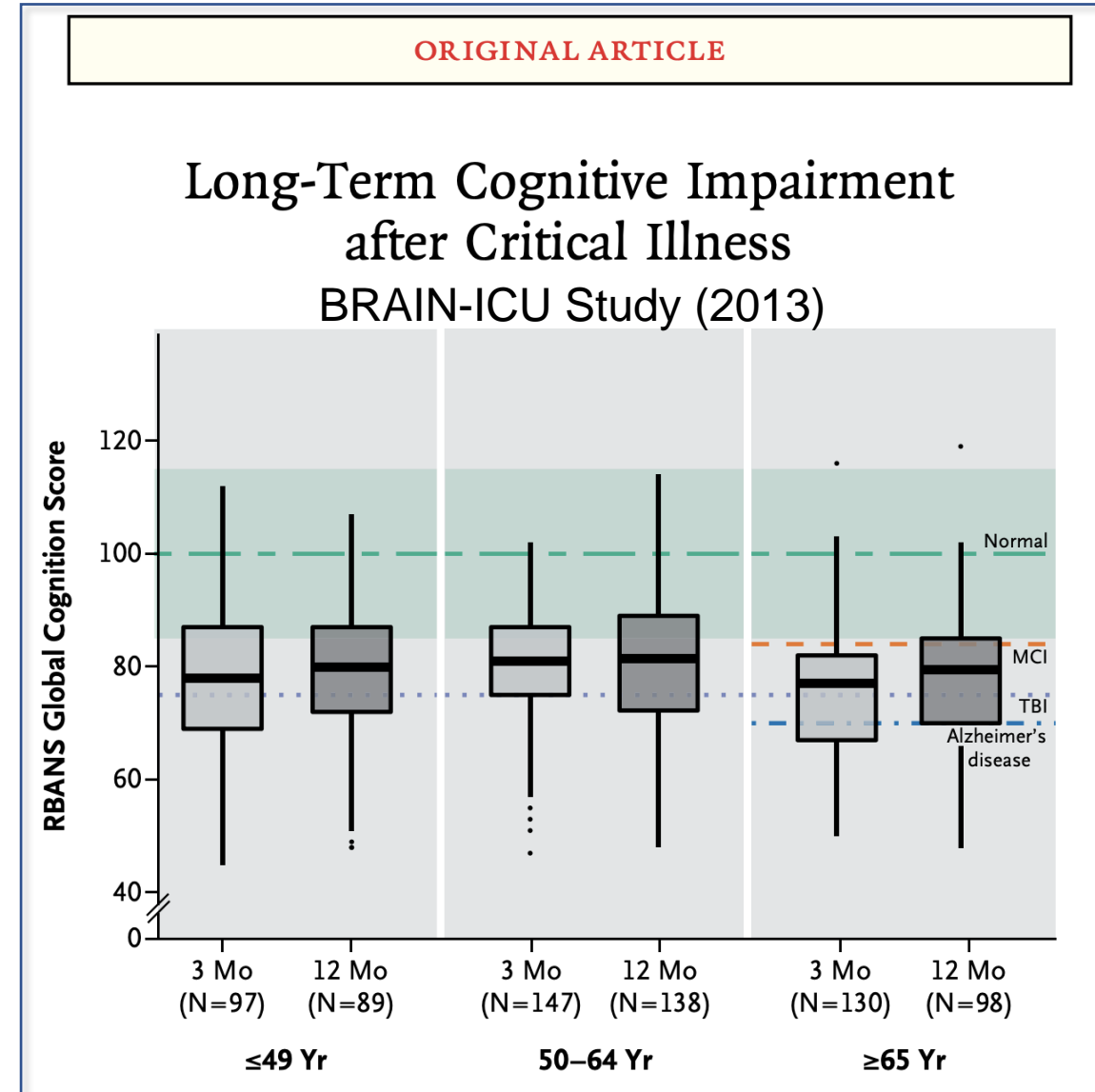


PICS: cognitive impairment

Longitudinal study of 821 ICU patients with respiratory failure or shock

- Median global cognitive score (where normal = 100) was:
 - 79 (3 months)
 - 80 (12 months)
- At 3 months, 40% had scores equivalent to individuals with TBI and 26% had scores equivalent to individuals with mild Alzheimer's disease

RBANS = Repeatable Battery for the Assessment of Neuropsychological Status



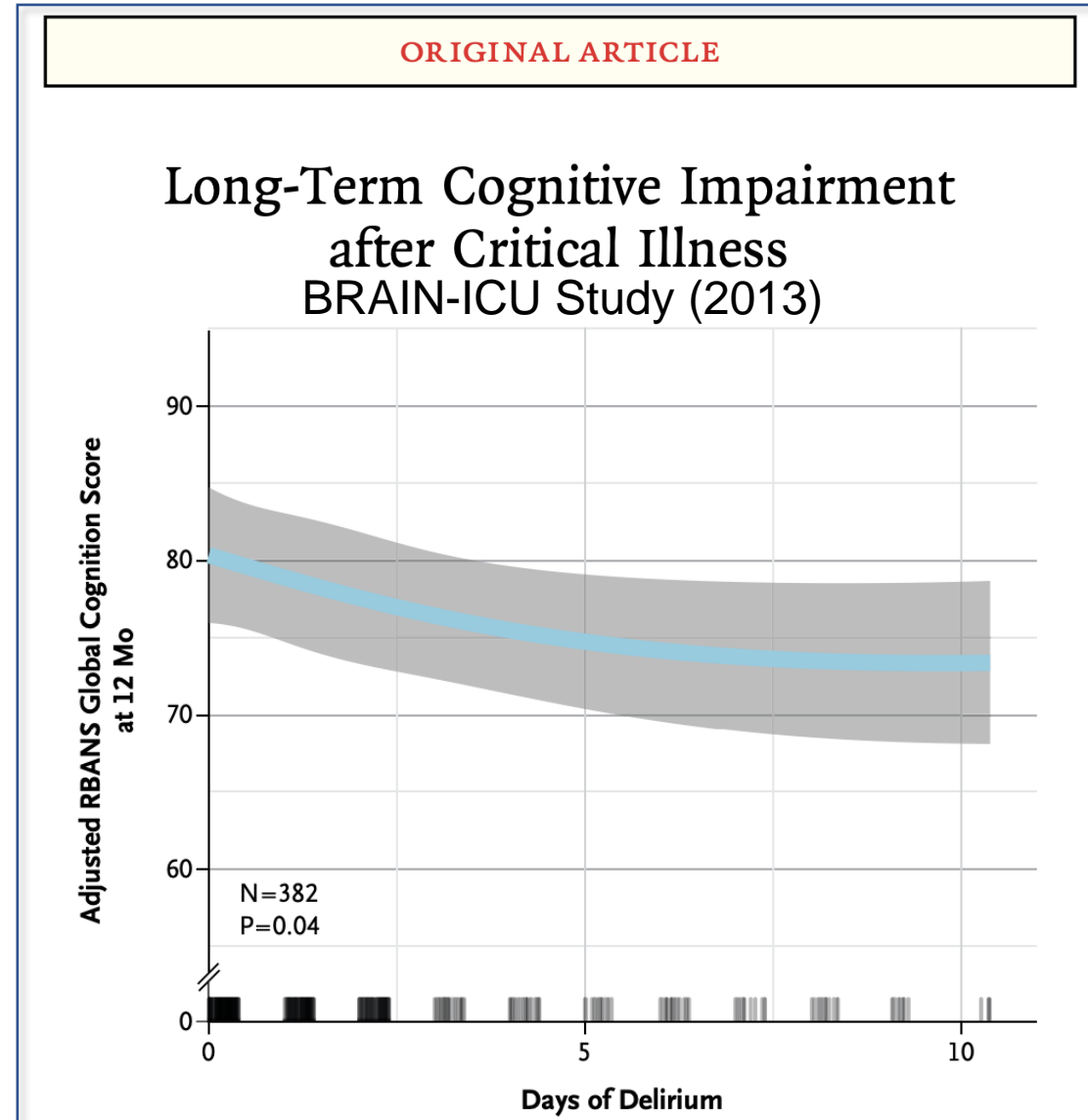
PICS: cognitive impairment

Longitudinal study of 821 ICU patients with respiratory failure or shock

- A longer duration of delirium was independently associated with worse global cognition

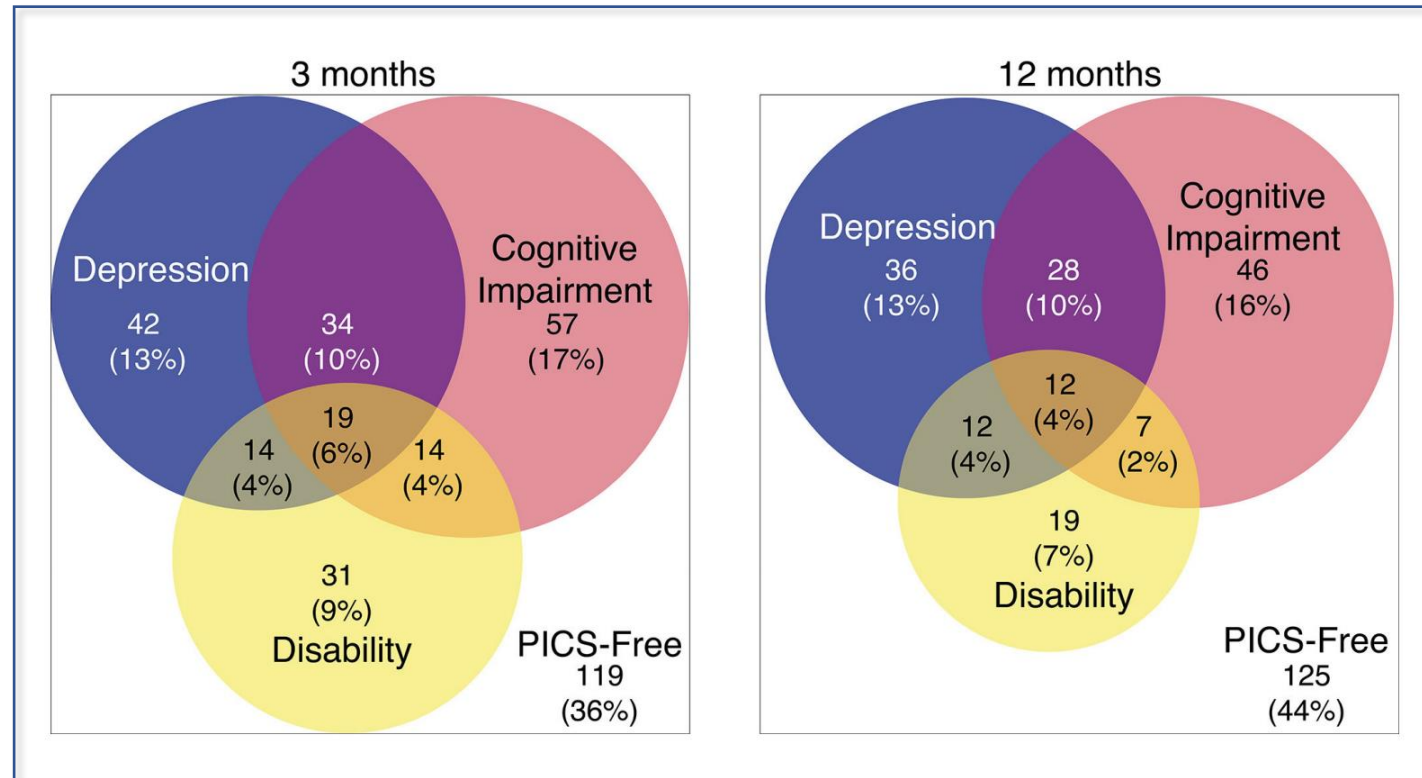
~55% of critically ill COVID patients develop delirium

RBANS = Repeatable Battery for the Assessment of Neuropsychological Status

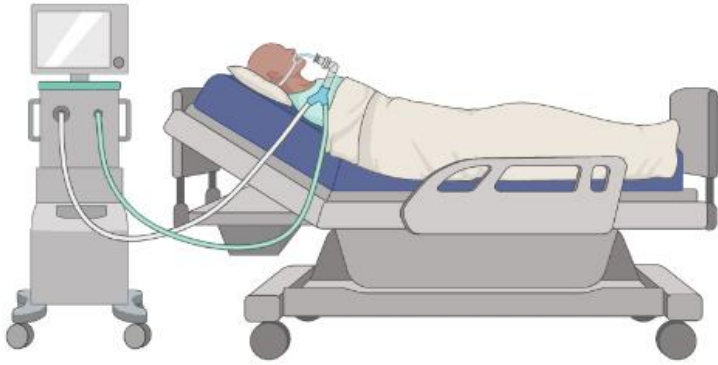


PICS: psychological impairment

- Up to 50% develop anxiety and/or depression
- Up to 25% develop PTSD
- More than one overlapping problem in ~20% at 1 year



Post-ICU patients have unique needs



Patients who survived
critical illness due to
COVID-19

Screen for post-intensive care syndrome (PICS)

- PHQ-4 (anxiety and depression), PTSD-PC-5 (PTSD), and mini-MOCA
- Don't forget family members, financial toxicity, and disparities in these outcomes

Screen for other complications of critical illness

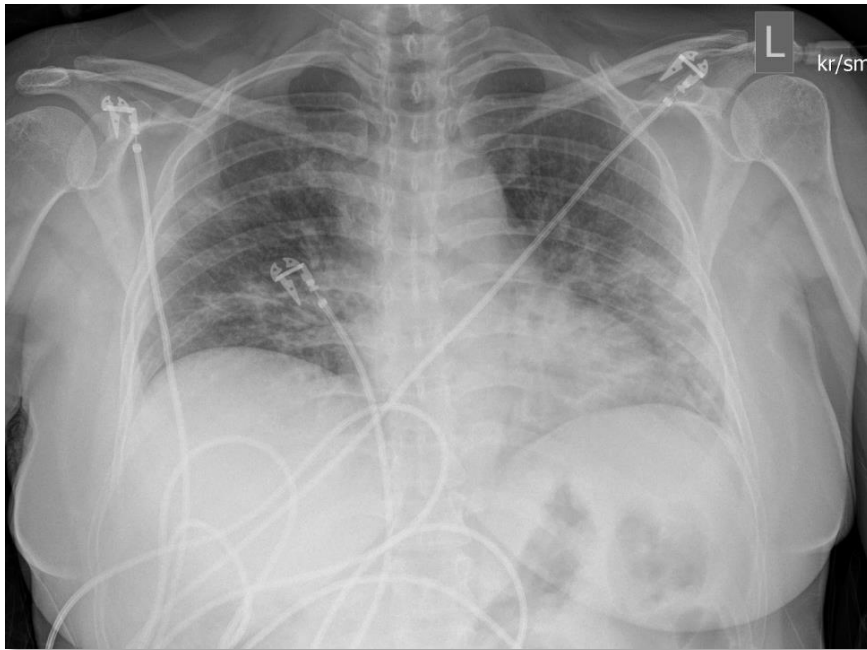
- Supraglottic, glottic, or infraglottic complications of endotracheal intubation or tracheostomy

Multidisciplinary evaluation is helpful

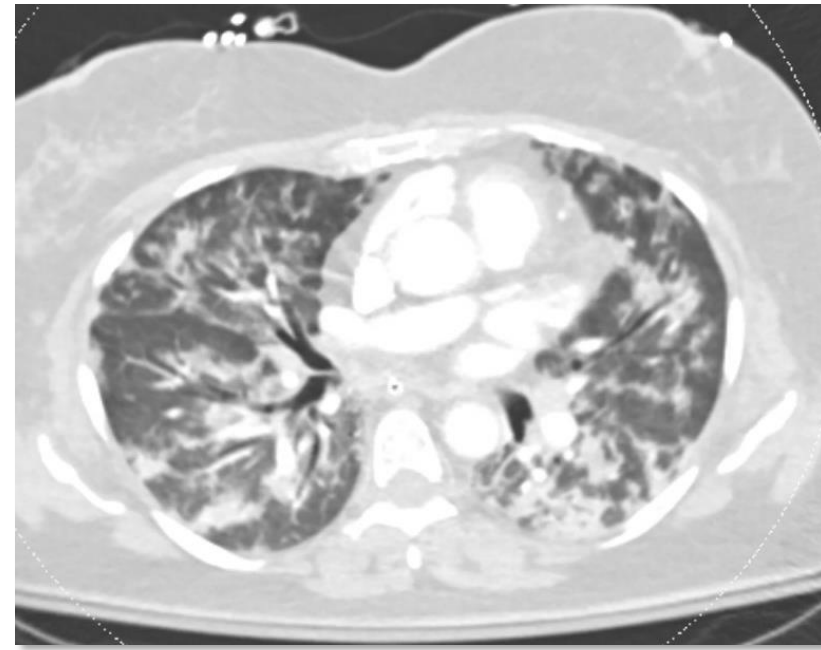
- Mental health evaluation and counseling
- Physical and occupational therapy
- Speech language pathology for cognitive therapy
- Pulmonary rehabilitation program
- If available, consider referral to dedicated PICS clinic

Case 2

57-year-old Latinx woman with obesity and OSA hospitalized for 10 days with pneumonia due to SARS-CoV-2 requiring supplemental oxygen and treated with remdesivir and dexamethasone



Admission chest radiograph

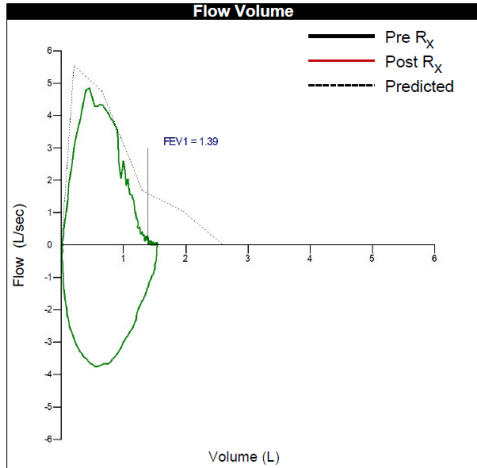


Admission CTPE

Case 2

6 months after discharge she reports chronic non-productive cough, dyspnea with 1 flight of stairs, and exertional tachycardia

Flow-volume loop



No suggestion of tracheal or laryngeal pathology

Spirometry at BTPS		ATS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Pre Bronchodilator						
		Actual	Predicted	% Pred	LLN	ULN	ZScore			
FEV ₁	L	1.39	2.09	67	1.60	2.59	-2.38	A	M	
FVC	L	1.55	2.60	60	1.99	3.22	-2.79	A	MS	
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	90	81	111	69	92	1.44	N		
FEF ₂₅₋₇₅	L/s	2.85	2.09	136	1.10	3.08	1.08			
PEFR	L/s	4.86	5.55	88	4.15	6.95	----			
FIVC	L	1.55	2.60	60	1.99	3.22	----			
FEF ₅₀ / FIF ₅₀		1.17	----	----	----	----	----			

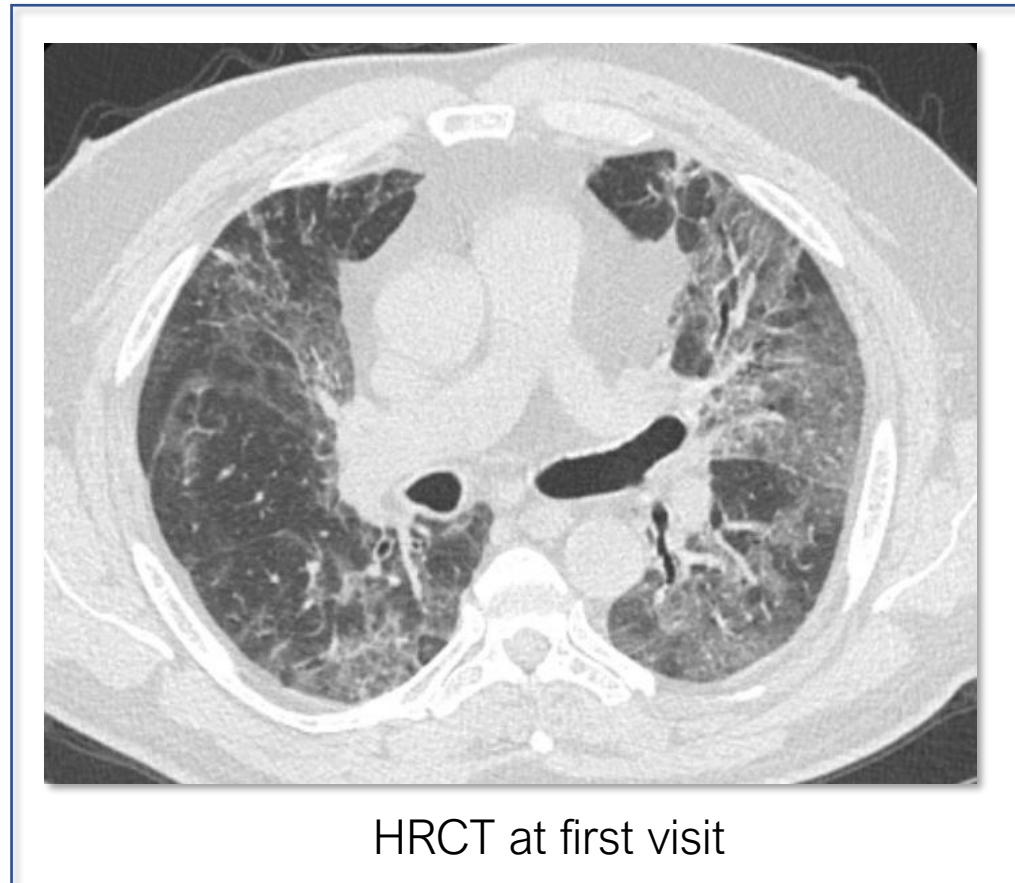
Diffusion		ATS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		Pre Bronchodilator						
		Actual	Predicted	% Pred	CI Range					
DLCO	mL/min/mmHg	8.68	19.50	45	13.00	26.00				
DLCO [Hb]	mL/min/mmHg	8.97	19.50	46	13.00	26.00	A	m		
Hb	g/dl	12.4	13.4	----	12.0	16.0				
VA [BTPS]	L	2.24	4.15	54	4.08	4.23				

Normal FEV₁/FVC ratio
 ↓ FEV₁
 ↓ FVC
 Suggestive of restriction

D_LCO is mildly impaired

Case 2

6 months after discharge with persistent respiratory symptoms and evidence of restriction and impaired gas exchange on PFTs



Case 2

What is the most likely cause of this patient's shortness of breath?

- A) Persistent SARS-CoV-2 infection
- B) Organizing pneumonia
- C) Tracheal stenosis
- D) Deconditioning
- E) Pulmonary fibrotic sequelae of ARDS
- F) None of the above

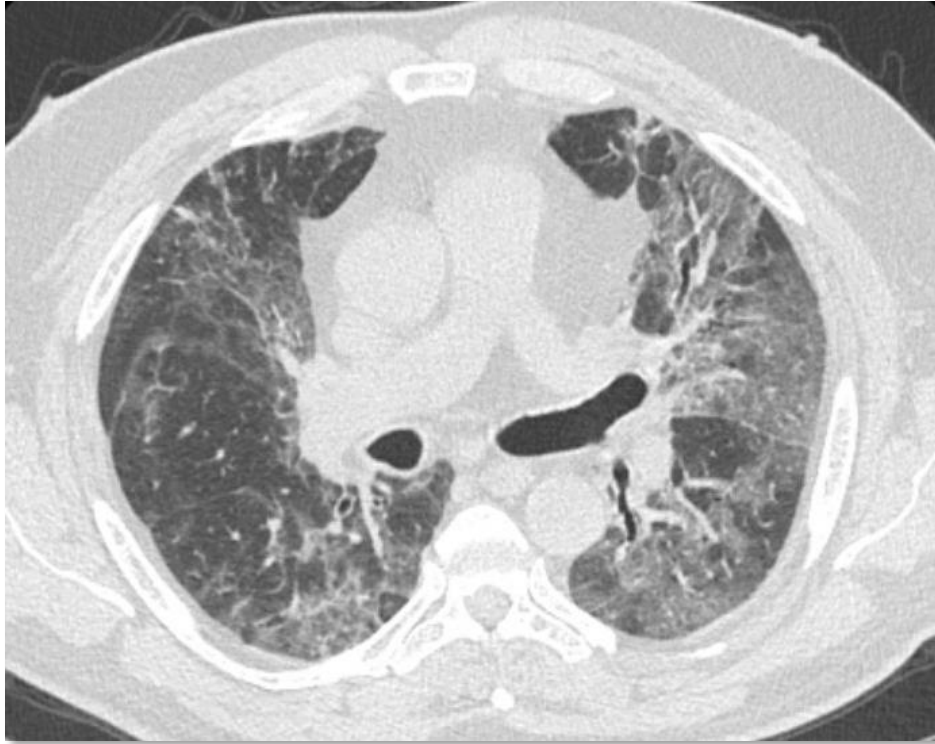
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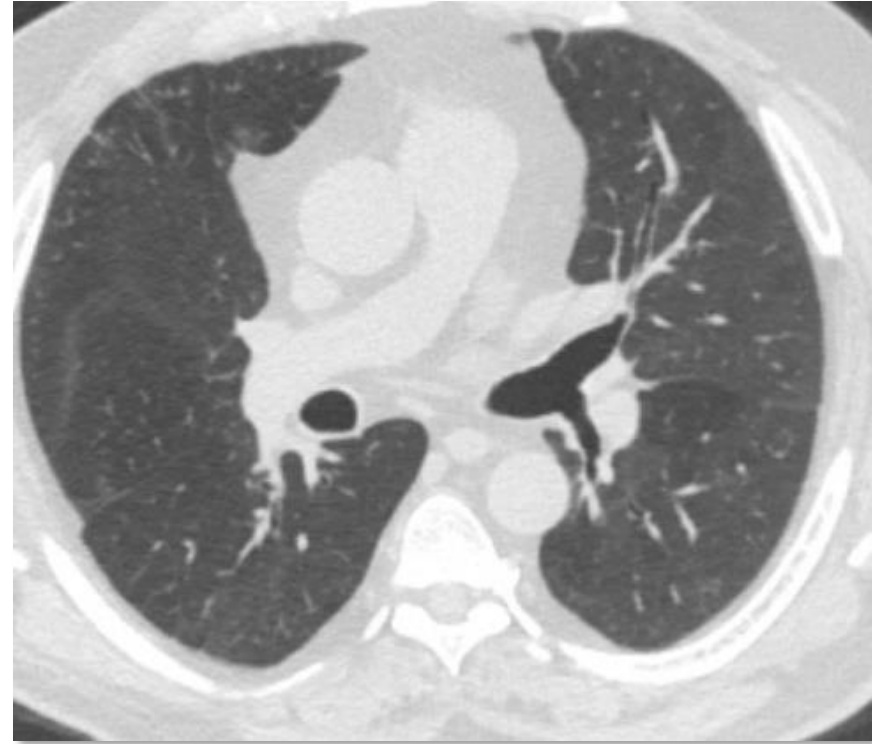
Case 2

Treated with prednisone 0.5 mg/kg x 1 month and then tapered over the next 8 weeks with resolution of her cough and improvement in dyspnea



HRCT at first visit

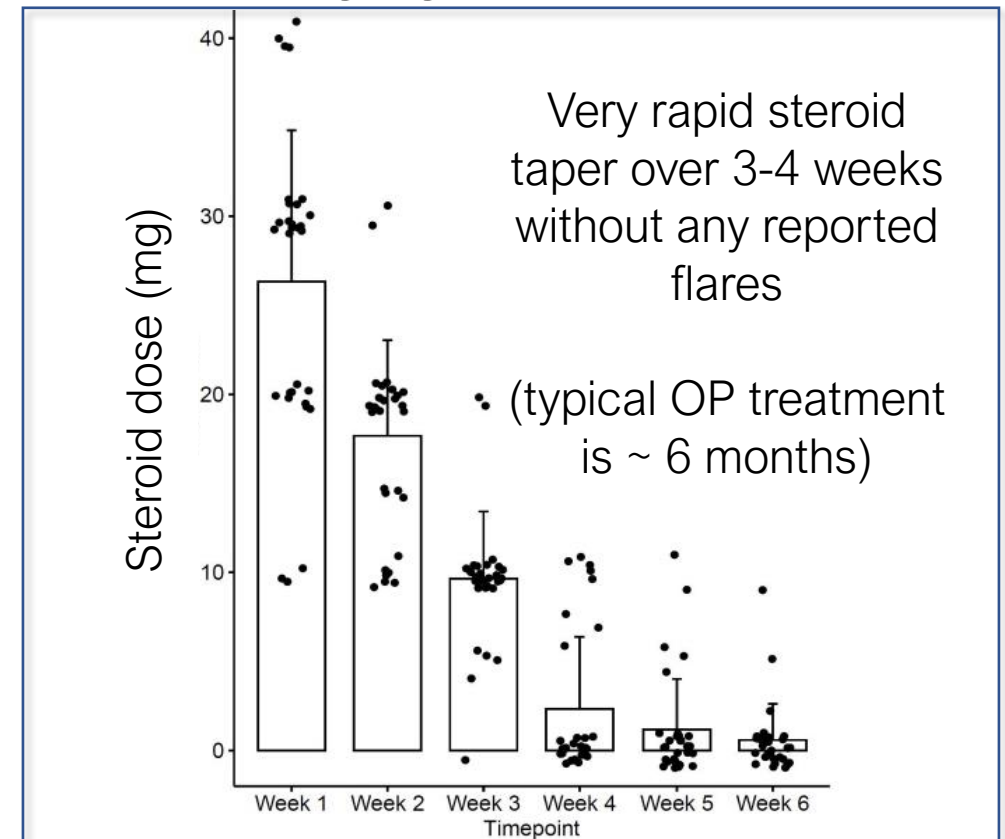
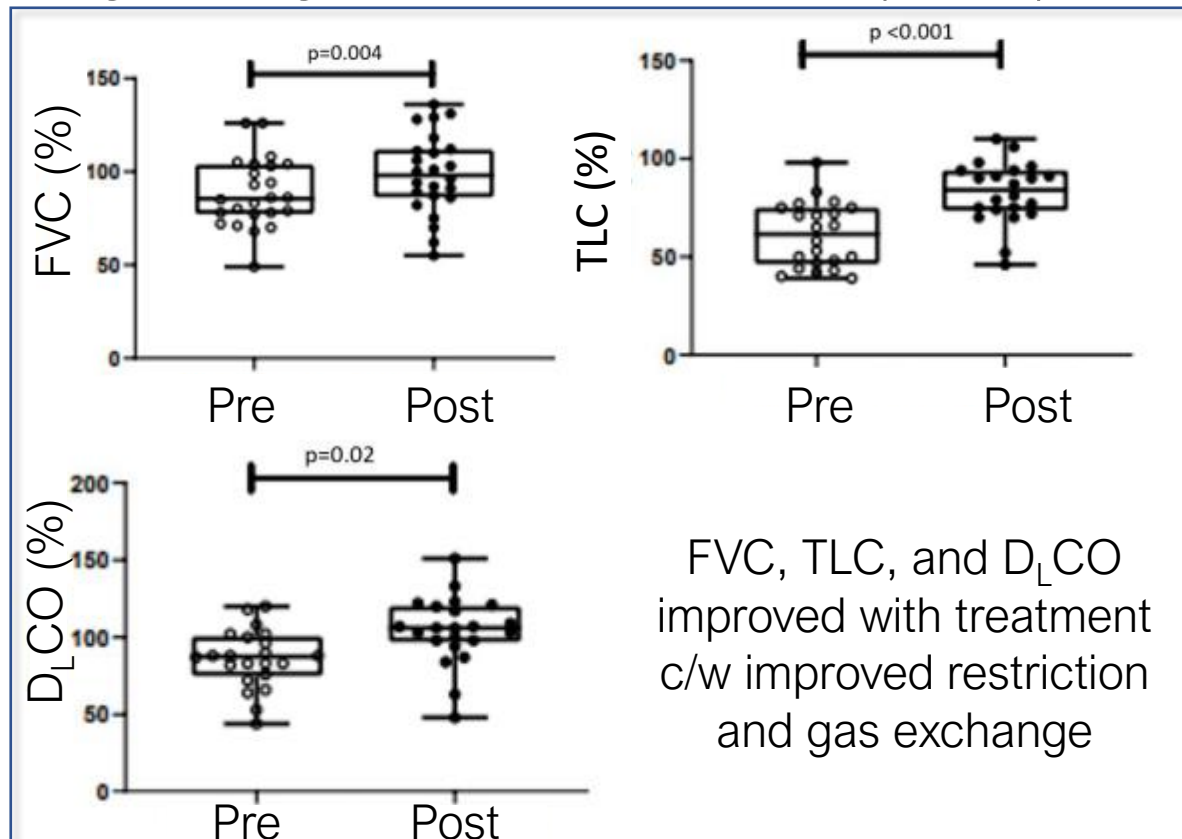

Prednisone
40 mg QD



Follow up HRCT

Organizing Pneumonia

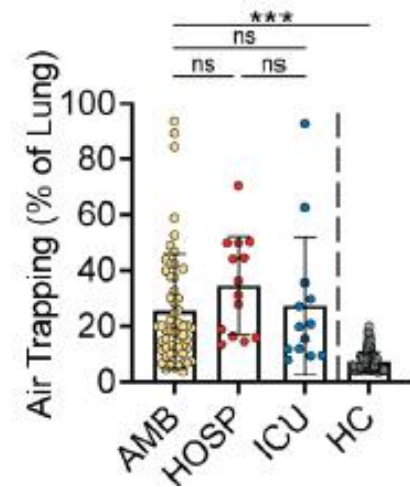
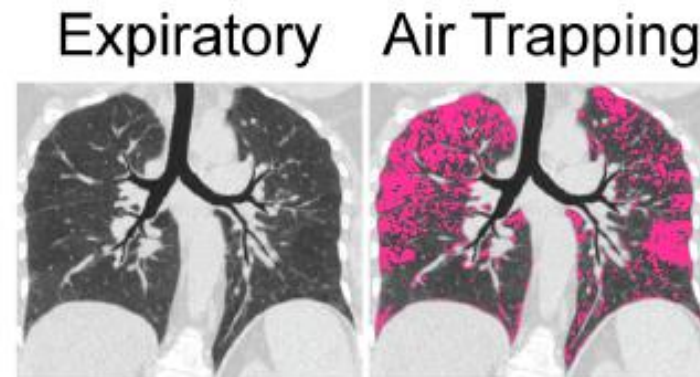
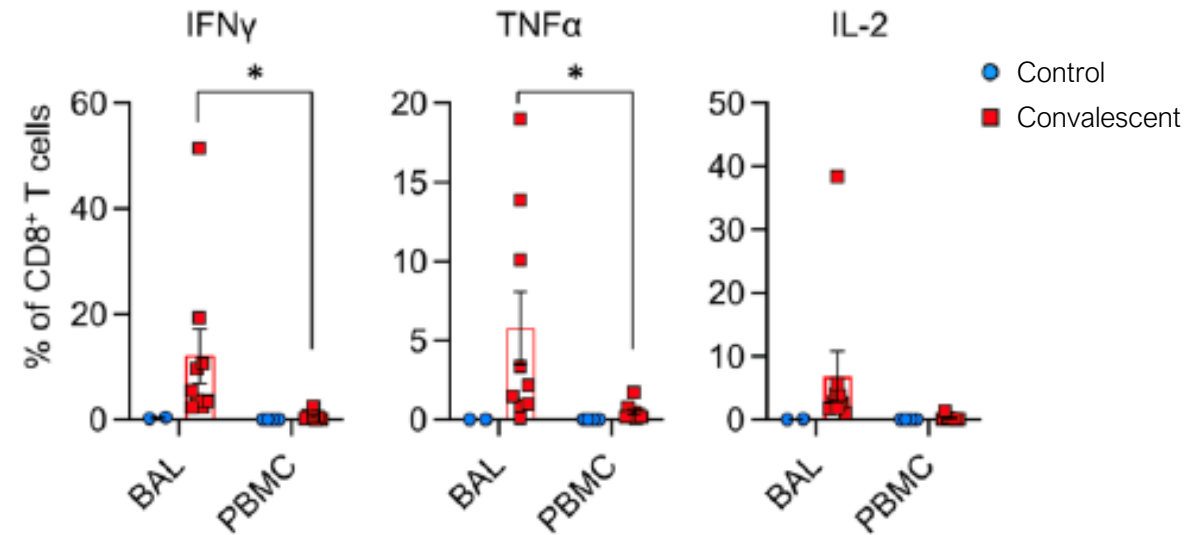
Case series of patients (n=837) post-COVID-19 with 35 (4.8%) found to have organizing pneumonia and 30 (3.6%) treated with 0.5 mg/kg prednisone



Pathobiology of Post COVID Lung Disease



- Acute systemic inflammation resolves during convalescence but \uparrow lung tissue-resident CD8⁺ T cells associated with impaired lung function
- More severe disease results in more interstitial parenchymal Δ s, but **air trapping (small airways disease)** seen in $\sim 25\%$ of *all* convalescent cases not detectable by PFTs



Pulmonary Sequelae of COVID-19



- Typical post-ARDS sequelae
 - At 5 years, 75% will have residual parenchymal abnormalities
- Chronic organizing pneumonia pattern
 - Based on reported literature, ~5% of patients following SARS-CoV-2 pneumonia
- Mild mosaic attenuation and air trapping on HRCT expiratory views
 - Suggestive of small airways inflammation (bronchiolitis)
- Airway complications (related to intubation and tracheostomy)
 - Incidence in the literature anywhere from 1-10%
- Venous thromboembolism
 - Acute macro- and micro-thromboses observed in ~15-20% of patients with acute COVID-19
 - However, in the post-acute setting < 5% incidence

Evaluation of Pulmonary Sequelae



- Understand their initial disease severity and clinical course
 - Disease severity, complications of illness and hospitalization, and interventions inform post-acute sequelae
- Identify objective signs of abnormal pulmonary function to guide workup
 - Full pulmonary testing including spirometry, lung volumes, and D_LCO
 - Exertional oximetry to detect occult hypoxemia
- Refer to pulmonary specialist or dedicated post-COVID clinic
 - For consideration of additional imaging, testing (e.g., cardiopulmonary exercise testing), or treatments

Case 3

38-year-old nurse with migraines with mild COVID-19 with > 6 months of multiple symptoms including exercise intolerance, post-exertional malaise, insomnia, and cognitive impairments out of work on disability

Normal PFTs and HRCT

Abnormal tilt table testing

Cardiopulmonary exercise test (CPET)
with low peak oxygen consumption (VO_2)
and evidence of postural orthostatic
tachycardia syndrome (POTS)

Case 3

What is the most likely cause of this patient's shortness of breath?

- A) Persistent SARS-CoV-2 infection
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Case 3

What is the most likely cause of this patient's shortness of breath?

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Myalgic Encephalomyelitis / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS)

Clinical syndrome defined by having 3 symptoms:

1. >6 months of fatigue and inability to participate in routine activities that were possible before becoming ill
2. Post-exertional malaise
3. Unrefreshing sleep

Plus at least 1 of the following:

1. Impaired memory or ability to concentrate
2. Orthostatic intolerance

Our patient met all clinical
criteria for ME/CFS

Has been associated with several infectious diseases but pathobiology is unclear

There is no specific treatment

Dysautonomia / small fiber neuropathy

Two primary pathophenotypes emerge on invasive CPET in ME/CFS patients

1. “Preload failure” with low right atrial pressure / low cardiac output
2. “Peripheral shunt” with impaired peripheral O₂ extraction

In a cohort of ME/CFS patients (n=160), 50 (31%) had biopsy-proven small fiber neuropathy (SFN)

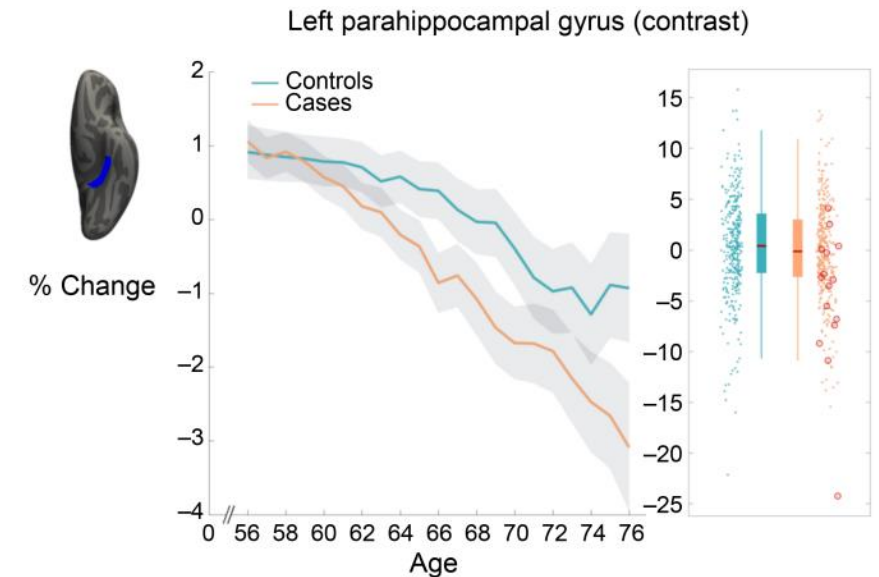
In post-COVID-19 cohorts, ~ 30% have abnormal autonomic testing (F>M)

- If dysautonomia present, ~80% have biopsy-proven SFN and ~50% have auto-antibodies (e.g., anti-TS-HDS, component of peripheral nerve sites)

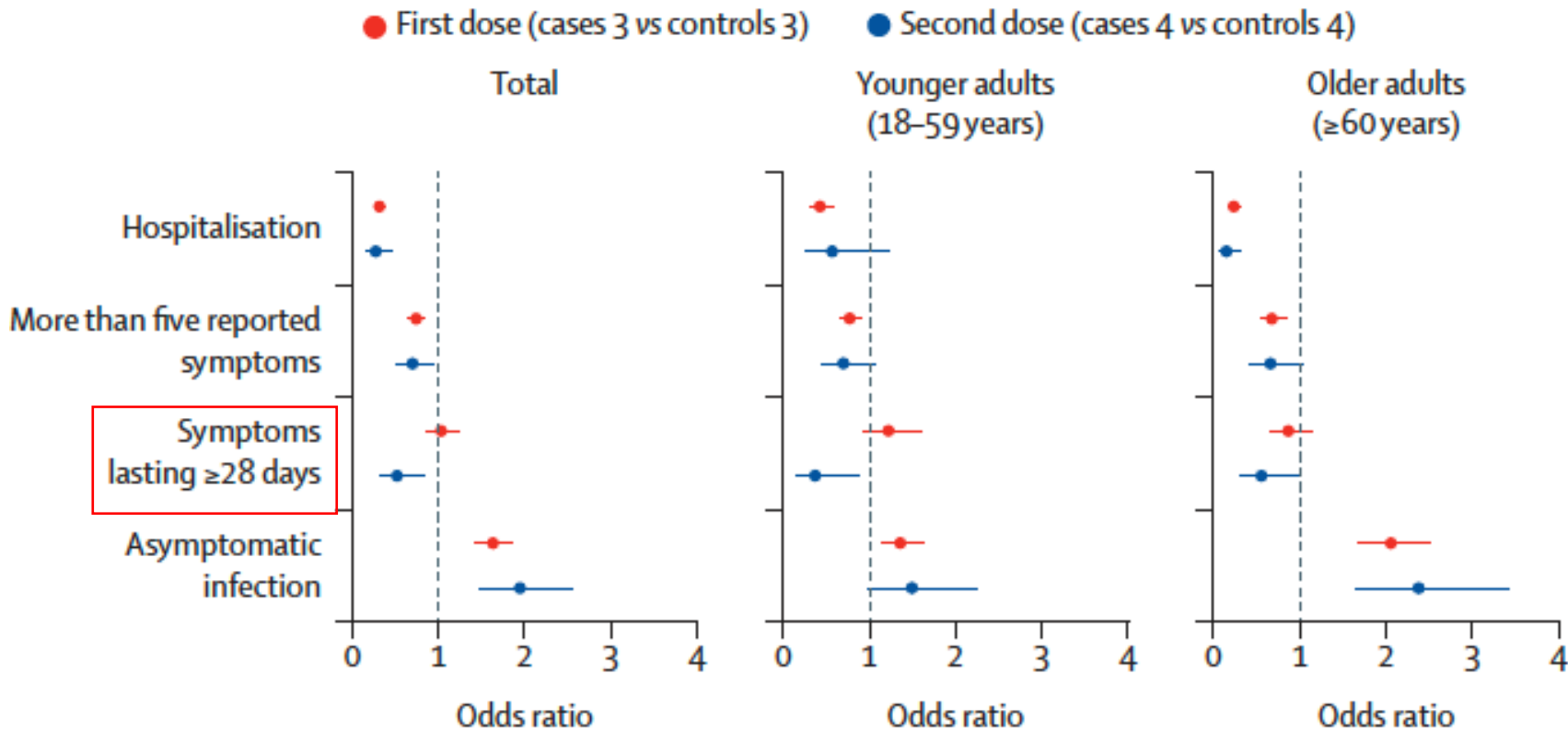
Pathobiology of neurologic sequelae in PASC



- No evidence of direct brain tissue infiltration of virus but there is evidence of response to peripheral inflammation and peripheral T cell infiltration with transcriptional changes that overlap with neurodegenerative diseases
- Compared to non-infected controls, COVID+ had:
 - Greater ↓ in grey matter thickness
 - Greater tissue damage in areas connected to olfactory cortex
 - Greater ↓ in global brain size
 - Greater ↓ in cognitive testing



Vaccination Decreases Incidence of “Long COVID”



Odds of symptoms lasting beyond 1 month (i.e., “long COVID”) is halved in the fully vaccinated group vs. matched unvaccinated controls

The NIH is funding research in PASC (\$470 million)



Boston COVID Recovery Cohort

Boston Medical Center	Mass General Brigham	Tufts Medical Center
Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center	Brigham and Women's Hospital	Cambridge Health Alliance
	Massachusetts General Hospital	

Take-home points

Survivors of COVID-19, regardless of disease severity, may manifest with PASC, and protracted symptoms beyond 4-12 weeks is common

PASC is a heterogenous disorder made up of distinct “syndromes” that we are still trying to understand but include common clinical syndromes (e.g., post-intensive care syndrome, organizing pneumonia, bronchiolitis) and rarer clinical syndromes (ME/CFS, dysautonomia, small fiber neuropathy, olfactory dysfunction)

Common themes underlying pathophysiology appear to be dysregulated immune cell responses with organ-specific manifestations

There are no specific, approved therapies for these different PASC phenotypes, but prevention with equitable distribution of vaccination, early post-exposure treatment, or pre-exposure prophylaxis is key



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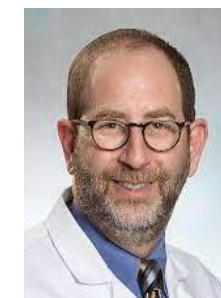
David Lin, MD



Emily Lewis, BA



Ingrid Bassett, MD MPH



Bruce Levy, MD

Resources for Patients

Body Politic COVID-19 Support Group:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScM2EeJhgisTUdo5Op6euyx1PYu8O-aNeDvYhXuPFa_Gs9PnQ/viewform

Body Politic COVID-19 Resources:

<https://www.wearebodypolitic.com/resources>

Survivor Corps Research Opportunities:

<https://www.survivorcorps.com/>

End Coronavirus Additional Resources:

<https://www.endcoronavirus.org/long-covid>

Diaphragmatic Breathing Exercises:

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-recovery-breathing-exercises>



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ON

BRAIN AND NERVE EXHAUSTION
(NEURASTHENIA),

AND ON THE

NERVOUS SEQUELÆ OF INFLUENZA.

BY

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FOURTH EDITION.

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1894.

THE

BOSTON MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.

NEW SERIES.]

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[VOL. III.—No. 13.

Original Communications.

NEURASTHENIA, OR NERVOUS EXHAUSTION.

By GEORGE BEARD, M.D., Lecturer on Nervous Diseases in the University of New York.

in the habit of employing the term *neurasthenia* to express the morbid state that is commonly indicated by the indefinite phrase nervous exhaustion.

This nomenclature would seem to be justified by philological analogy, by scientific convenience, and by actual necessity.

The derivation of the term *neurasthenia*