

COVID matters

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The ongoing impact of COVID-19 in, and on, the workplaces of Australia

“ I don't think there's ever been an experience where it has been such a prolonged period of continual learning.

KERRY CHANT
NSW CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER¹

Of course, Dr Chant is talking from the frontline perspective, as one of the handful of healthcare and medical experts responsible for managing the immediate impact of COVID-19 and, effectively, the lives and livelihoods of people across Australia.

That prolonged period of continual learning is equally taking place across research institutes, universities, hospitals, Government departments, peak bodies and workplaces across the world.

It's taking place at such a pace that one in five COVID-related research studies have needed correction after publication, a three-fold increase on the same time frame in 2019². It's hard to keep up, even for well-respected and peer-reviewed journals.

However, it's easy to understand we need this rapid evidence and information; first as a reaction and now as we seek new ways of coping with the disease and its aftermath. In Australia, the focus is turning to managing COVID-19 and its impact on how we live our lives and how we work.

That's where we step in.

So you don't have to, our experts are tracking research and studies as they are published. Our focus is on COVID-19 and its impact on long-term health, mental health, neurological conditions, fatigue-related issues, workplace risk and change and the Australian labour market.

It's a constant learning curve. We seek to make sense of it for you.

Here are overviews of four fascinating and recent articles and studies – just the parts you need to stay across the evidence and current thinking - along with our own comments on potential impacts for Australian insurers, lawyers and employers. We look from the perspective of managing your own workplace, as well as how you can best support your clients.

COVID Matters will be issued each month, until that wonderful time when we no longer need to track the explosion of new research and evidence. Please let us know if it is helpful – and if there are any other angles that would be useful for you.

If you have any questions or concerns about how you can best manage the potential impact of COVID-19 for your employees or your customers and clients, please get in touch.



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¹As quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, "The 12.39am email that triggered Australia's response to COVID-19", 7 December 2020

²<https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2020/213/11/changes-medical-scientific-publication-associated-covid-19-pandemic>

The Social Brain and Emotional Contagion: COVID-19 Effects

BY [Anna Valenzano](#), [Alessia Scarinci](#), [Vincenzo Monda](#), [Francesco Sessa](#), [Antonietta Messina](#), [Marcellino Monda](#), [Francesca Precenzano](#), [Maria Pina Mollica](#), [Marco Cartenuto](#), [Giovanni Messina](#), [Giuseppe Cibelli](#)

Medicina, 2020

The findings in a nutshell

The authors examine the relationship between COVID-19 and mental health and social interaction (especially 'emotional contagion') as the default mode by which individuals communicate with their surroundings. They find that, although the proportion of COVID-19 patients with neurological disorders varies amongst studies, there is evidence of a rise in people reporting mental health problems, particularly depression and anxiety.

Implications for Australian workplaces

Employers, insurers and government all have a role to play in easing the mental health burden as relates to COVID-19. Approaches include the provision and delivery of tools and stress management strategies to improve coping responses. Interventions should be geared to effectively manage the complexity of behavioural impairment including both neurological disorders (e.g. fear and anxiety) and neurocognitive disorders (e.g. attention and memory impairment, learning deficits).

[READ FULL ARTICLE](#)

Date published: 28 October 2020

Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Foggia, Foggia, Italy; Department of Education Sciences, Psychology, and Communication, University of Bari, Bari, Italy; Department of Experimental Medicine, Section of Human Physiology and Unit of Dietetics and Sports Medicine, Naples, Italy; Clinic of Child and Adolescent Neuropsychiatry, Department of Health, Physical and Preventative Medicine, Naples, Italy; Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Naples, Naples, Italy

The authors of this paper were from the above institutions and contributed equally to this work.

Post COVID Syndrome

BY [Masoud Mardani](#)

Archives of Clinical Infection, 2020

The findings in a nutshell

The author presents the common characteristics observed in 'post COVID-19 syndrome' and the pathways that may cause long term health conditions. Importantly, COVID-19 symptoms may persist after the original infection and the virus can cause long-term health complications such as heart failure/disease, neurological diseases and lung diseases.

The author advocates that the prevalence of fatigue induced symptoms from initial COVID-19 infection should be considered as a priority in terms of health and quality of life and proposes that treatment include a course in psychotherapy or increasing exercise with considerations to reassurance, self-care and symptomatic control (including sleep hygiene measures, cognitive behavioural therapy and exercise recommendations).

Implications for Australian workplaces

It is critical that insurers, employers, healthcare providers and government understand the different symptoms from Post COVID-19 syndrome. Important approaches include the management of chronic fatigue syndrome and pain (including muscle pain) and psychotherapies.

Employers can support the wellbeing of employees through knowledge and recognition of the symptoms of Post COVID-19 syndrome. Support systems and work flexibility should be tailored with the aim to reduce any potential long-term implications and improve quality of life for employees.

[READ FULL ARTICLE](#)

Date published: 13 September 2020

Infectious Diseases and Tropical Medicine Research Center, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

The author of this paper is from Infectious Diseases and Tropical Medicine Research Center, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran.

Anticipating the long-term cardiovascular effects of COVID-19

BY **Richard C. Becker**

Journal of Thrombosis and Thrombolysis, 2020

The findings in a nutshell

The author's view is that the COVID-19 virus causes a variety of health impacts on organs, causing long-term health implications for different parts of the body. The frequency of cardiac injury, vascular dysfunction and thrombosis in patients with COVID-19 (including mild to severe COVID-19 initial presentations) results in a need for a proactive approach to care following hospital discharge and among patients with persisting or new symptoms.

The approach recommended in the review focuses on the need for expertise, standardised procedures and resources from a variety of medical areas, such as infectious diseases, cardiology, vascular medicine, pulmonary medicine, haematology, with components of psychiatry, rheumatology, dermatology, nephrology, neurology and immunology included.

It is recommended that this should be driven by the goal of prevention, education and communication. The author predicts long-term cardiovascular effects of COVID-19 and advocates for tailored/multidisciplinary cardiovascular management strategies (such as a purpose-designed COVID-19 Cardiovascular Clinic) to help manage the long term and complex impacts of COVID-19.

Implications for Australian workplaces

Insurers, employers, healthcare providers and government should encourage a multidisciplinary, team-based approach. Standardised procedures should be considered to provide the relevant support and enable such strategies to effectively treat and manage the complex medical effects of COVID-19.

Employers can support the wellbeing of employees through knowledge of the many medical effects of COVID-19, by providing flexibility in the workplace that accommodates health monitoring and by making provisions for potential long-term implications.



[READ FULL ARTICLE](#)

Date published: 3 September 2020

Department of Medicine, University of Cincinnati Heart and Circulation Research Institute, University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

The author of this paper is from Department of Medicine, University of Cincinnati Heart and Circulation Research Institute, University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA.

Bidirectional associations between COVID-19 and psychiatric disorder: Retrospective cohort studies of 62,354 COVID-19 cases in the USA

BY [Maxime Taquet](#), [Sierra Luciano](#), [John R Geddes](#), [Paul J Harrison](#)
Lancet Psychiatry, 2020

The findings in a nutshell

This paper provides an analysis of a large dataset to determine whether being diagnosed with COVID-19 has a relationship with future and past diagnoses of a psychiatric (or mental health) disorder.

There are two main findings from this data analysis:

1. A COVID-19 diagnosis is a risk factor for developing a mental health disorder, with an anxiety disorder the most likely followed by mood disorder
2. Individuals who have a history of a psychiatric disorder are at greater risk of being diagnosed with COVID-19

This paper also recognises the growing need for mental health services and support from the perspective of disease comorbidity.

The authors are from the Department of Psychiatry at University of Oxford in the United Kingdom.



Implications for Australian workplaces

Health providers should be equipped to provide mental health services to any members who have had a COVID-19 diagnosis; and also to educate those individuals with a psychiatric illness diagnosis on recommended risk reduction practices.

Employers should be aware of the relationship between COVID-19 and mental illness and ensure they are equipped to provide appropriate support and referral to services.

[READ FULL ARTICLE](#)

Date published: 12 November 2020

Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, Warneford Hospital, Oxford, UK

Here in Australia we are comparatively lucky. In contrast to most of the world, we have managed low COVID-19 case numbers, low hospitalisations and low death rates. Of course even one person impacted by illness or death is one person too many.

From absenteeism to anxiety; from vulnerable cohorts to risk mitigation; from fitness and wellbeing to work-from-home ergonomics; from proactive mental health management to hybrid work models; the workforce management implications from the pandemic are broad and many.

Some of these changes may be for the better and some are just plain challenging. All need to be proactively managed.

Your COVID coverage

As medical, allied health and occupational health and rehabilitation specialists, the teams at **mlcoa** and **IPAR** already provide the types of services that support Australian businesses to make informed decisions and reduce risks, all while improving health and employment outcomes for people.

Please talk with us about the issues you are managing. We'll either have a service that can support you and your people; or we'll draw on our diverse capabilities to help you solve any issues and create better outcomes.

Staying across what matters

Our experts are engaging in regular reviews of journal articles and the latest research and thinking around COVID-19. This newsletter will come out regularly until a sharp focus on COVID is no longer as relevant (roll on!).

Despite our relative fortune, every single Australian business has COVID-19 related issues to grapple with.

JOIN US FOR OUR INTERACTIVE WEBINAR

Supporting your workforce through (more!) change: The pandemic's impact on people and places in 2021

Join mlcoa and IPAR experts in an interactive webinar discussing how to best manage both the physical and mental health aspects of the workplace during the pandemic.

You will hear from:

- Dr Joanna Holland – Occupational & Environmental Physician, mlcoa
- Dr Truls Bratten – Psychiatrist, mlcoa
- Dorothy Frost – General Manager, Research & Innovation, MedHealth
- Aleena Jambazian – Registered Psychologist, IPAR

The discussion will cover the latest research and insights on COVID-19 and the implications for Australian workplaces, how to support your people through change and how to set up your business for a productive future.



This webinar is a live national event and is free of charge, and will be on:

Thursday, 18 March 2021 at 12:00 pm to 1:15 pm AEDT

(all other time zones listed as you register)

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