Assessing cognition in long COVID

What is long COVID?

Long COVID is also called long-haul COVID or chronic COVID, among others. It is described as the signs, symptoms, and conditions that continue or develop after the initial COVID-19 infection. It may involve multiple body systems, which may or may not have been affected during the initial infection. Symptoms may have a relapsing-remitting pattern which may worsen over time.

What are common symptoms of long COVID?

There are many symptoms, but here are the most commonly reported ones:

- Fatigue
- Brain fog
- Insomnia
- Changes in smell and taste
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Palpitations
- Dizziness
- Depression
- Anxiety

Rebecca Boersma, MA, CCC-SLP reported in her MedBridge course that brain fog can manifest as:

- Severe cognitive fatigue and crashes.
- Slowed processing.
- Impaired working memory.
- Making simple mistakes.
- Loss of creativity.
- Trouble focusing.
- Trouble making decisions.
- Lack of initiation of simple tasks.
- Frequent word-finding difficulty.

The SLP's role in assessing cognitive skills in patients with long COVID

Our role is to assist patients to compensate for or restore their pre-illness cognitive-communication skills, to the extent possible, so that they may participate in their usual personal, professional, and community activities.

We don't yet have specific assessment tools for long COVID, but mTBI presents a similar profile and can serve as a guide.

Four evidence-based assessment activities for cognition

1. Motivational interviewing
2. Collaborative goal setting
3. Patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs)
4. Standardized assessment tools

The basics of Motivational Interviewing

- Express empathy through reflective, non-judgemental listening.
- Assist patients to see the discrepancy between their current abilities and their goals.
- Roll with resistance. Don't try to reason with your patient.
- Support self-efficacy and resilience.

Example PROMs

- Neuro-QoL.
- PROMIS Cognitive Function.
- Modified Fatigue Impact Scale.
- Multifactorial Memory Questionnaire.
- Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function - Adult Version.
- Communicative Participation Item Bank.
- La Trobe Communication Questionnaire.

Example standardized assessment tools

1. Repeatable Battery for the Assessment of Neuropsychological Status (RBANS)
2. Functional Assessment of Verbal Reasoning and Executive Strategies (FAVRES)
3. Cognitive Linguistic Quick Test (CLQT)

Learn more about assessing cognitive-communication skills in long COVID: https://eatspeakthink.com/assess-cognition-long-covid

Selected references

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