Gac Sanit. 2025;39(S2):521

Gaceta Sanitaria

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287 - LONG COVID AND ITS IMPACT ON HEALTHCARE WORKER'S JOB PERFORMANCE. A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN SPAIN

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Resumen

Background/Objectives: Long COVID impacts the ability of affected individuals to work. Healthcare workers (HCWs) with long COVID may face additional challenges due to high demands of their jobs. Aim: to explore the opinion of healthcare workers from 8 Spanish hospitals with long COVID and providers on the impact of this condition on job performance.

Methods: A constructivist and phenomenological approach were applied. Seven online focus groups (n = 73), including HCWs with a probable diagnosis of long COVID and providers HCWS, and interviews (n = 4) with key stakeholders were conducted between April and June 2024 following pre-designed guidelines. Transcriptions were analysed using Atlas.ti, with themes and subthemes identified and reviewed by the research team.

Results: Seven main themes emerged. Long COVID impact on job performance was significant, with physical, cognitive and emotional limitations. HCWs referred working despite symptoms due to lack of diagnosis, work pressure and personal needs. Many were reluctant to take sick leaves, feeling it as failing as HCW, experiencing guilt and psychological distress. Receiving support and accommodations in the workplace was crucial yet varied widely. Some faced scepticisms about the veracity of their disease, even reporting symbolic violence and direct bullying from colleagues and supervisors who doubted their symptoms and job limitations. Returning to work was challenging,

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as HCWs were expected to be fully recovered but often faced pressure to return prematurely. Facilitators for working with long COVID included potential work accommodations, though implementing them was often challenging, leading to a cycle of persistent symptoms, work struggles and emotional distress. Proposal for improvement and needs include recognizing long COVID as an occupational disease, increasing workplace and healthcare support, and institutional coordination.

Conclusions/Recommendations: Long COVID has shown the significant impacts on job performance in the healthcare sector in the present Spanish study, highlighting the need for recognition, further support and work accommodations.

Funding: CIBER (Intramural ESP23PI04). AGAUR-FI grants (2023 FI-3 00065) Joan Oró.

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