

Long Covid in primary care: survey among general practitioners (spring 2022, Belgium)

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Keywords

primary health care - Long Covid – population health

Background

With the COVID-pandemic going on for years, the **number of patients suffering from long-term COVID-19-related symptoms (referred to a ‘Long Covid’) is increasing.**

General practitioners (GPs) take a key position in caring for these Long Covid patients.

But

- no widely accepted definition or evidence-based clinical guidelines available in general practice
- little is known about the care provided for these patients in primary care

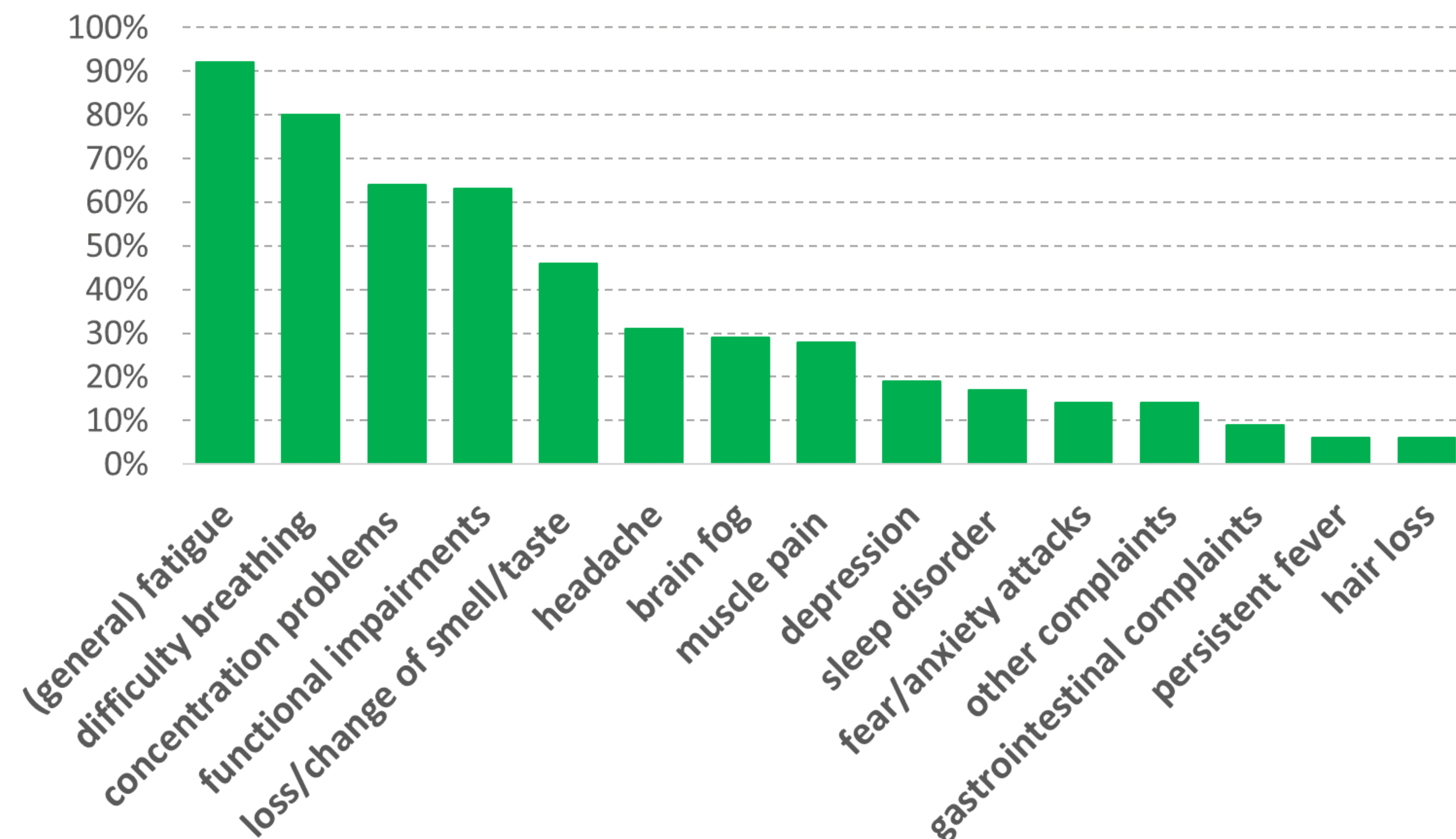
Methods

- online **survey** (validated by expert panel) to gain **insight in the knowledge, experience and opinions of GPs on Long Covid**
- study population: all GPs of the Belgian SGP network
- distributed Febr-March 2022 (voluntary participation)
- 16 (ordinal, open-ended, multiple choice) questions on Long Covid + practice and GP demographic characteristics

Results

- Responders = 48 GPs
- **Definition and diagnostic criteria used by GPs:**
 - 75% stated that a positive COVID-19 test is required when speaking about Long Covid complaints
 - duration of persistent symptoms (from 4 weeks to 5 months) as main criterion for identifying Long Covid patients
- **75% of GPs reported to have encountered patients with Long Covid symptoms in their practice** (no difference between practice type, GPs’ gender/age)
- **Caring for Long Covid patients:**
 - 94% of GPs preferred a multidisciplinary approach
 - 50% is followed up by GP (colleagues), 31% in multidisciplinary cooperation
 - other healthcare professionals involved are: pneumologists (89%), physiotherapists (61%), specialists in physical medicine/rehabilitation (50%) and neurologists (22%)
 - GPs are consulted biweekly by 19% and monthly by 33% of these patients
- A median of 2 Long Covid patients per 1000 active patients was estimated

Long Covid symptoms in primary care



Conclusion

This study shows that a majority of GPs:

- **use similar definitions and diagnostic criteria**
- **frequently provide care to Long Covid patients**
- **take a key role in the (multidisciplinary) coordination of care** for Long Covid patients
- **multidisciplinary care is organized less than preferred** by GPs