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Role of physiotherapists and the pandemic

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THE role of physiotherapists in the treatment and management of people affected by 'Long COVID' is the theme for World Physiotherapy Day celebrated earlier this week.

"Our role as physiotherapists have become even more critical in the COVID-19 care spectrum," said William Koong, the president of the Fiji Physiotherapists Association.

"Physiotherapy services are an integral pathway of collaborative care in prevention, restoration and rehabilitation pathways."

He said the physiotherapy profession was primarily concerned with "movement science" and aims at maximising quality of function and 'movement potential'.

In explaining Long-COVID, Koong said "Long COVID, also known as a post-COVID-19 syndrome, post-acute sequelae of COVID-19 (PASC), chronic COVID syndrome (CCS) and long-haul COVID, is a condition characterised by long-term sequelae — appearing or persisting after the typical convalesce period — of COVID-19".

"Long COVID can affect nearly every organ system with sequelae including respiratory system disorders, nervous system and neurocognitive disorders, mental health disorders, metabolic disorders, cardiovascular disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, malaise, fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, and anaemia.

He said one in every 10 people living with Long COVID would exhibit symptoms for a period of 12 weeks or longer.

"Its a multi-system disease with over 200 listed symptoms which occur in variable combinations and can fluctuate in both predictable and unpredictable patterns, Koong explained. He said signs and symptoms of 'Long COVID' usually develop during the infection and continue for more than 12 weeks or more after the infection.

Physiotherapy can help minimise the negative impact of COVID-19 on health and functionally.

Emma Stokes, World Physiotherapy president, said in a global statement marking the day: "The most common symptoms of Long COVID, after six months, include extreme exhaustion, post-exertional symptom exacerbation, and problems with memory and concentration".

Physiotherapy interventions are tailored toward holistic rehabilitation to address all system impairments and play a crucial role in facilitating functional recovery, resumption to work and social normalcy.

Stokes encouraged all post-COVID patients experiencing any of these symptoms to seek physiotherapy help with managing these post COVID issues.