

- Virus

Battle far from over for Covid long-haulers

The Manila Times · 11 Oct 2021 · A54 · BY CHRISTIAN CROW MAGHANOY

THE recovery period typically lasts a few weeks, sometimes months, for people who have survived Covid-19. Their ordeal ends once they become symptom-free.

But what if the symptoms linger long after one has been declared as having recovered from the disease? The US National Institutes of Health has a term for this condition: postacute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 or PASC, more commonly referred to as post-Covid syndrome or long-term Covid.

People living with PASC are known as “longhaulers,” according to Johns Hopkins Medicine in Baltimore. While it is clear that people with certain risk factors are more likely to develop a serious case of Covid-19, there isn’t a clear link between those factors and long-term problems. More worrisome is that PASC can affect people with even mild symptoms. Covid-19 can attack the human body in a range of ways, causing damage to the lungs, heart, nervous system, kidneys, liver and other organs. Mental health problems can arise from grief and loss, unresolved pain or fatigue, or post-traumatic stress disorder after treatment.

In a study posted on its website on April 1, 2021, Johns Hopkins said the most common lasting symptoms among Covid-19 survivors were fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, joint pain, and chest pain. They can also suffer from cognitive problems, difficulty concentrating, depression, muscle pain, headache, skin disease, rapid heartbeat, and intermittent fever.

To understand what life is like for a Covid-19 long hauler, The Manila Times spoke with two people who are coping with the condition.

For 37-year-old Annie May Alegato of Bangkal, Makati City, it all started last March 21. That day, Alegato — a performance marketing supervisor for an e-commerce retailer — had just arrived home from a neighborhood grocery store when she felt the symptoms of Covid-19.

She eventually tested positive for the disease, was admitted to a local public hospital and was quarantined in an intensive care unit for at least three weeks.

Back at work a few weeks after her recovery, she felt “absent-minded” during meetings. Alegato, who is type two bipolar, found her mental condition worsening. She placed the blame squarely on Covid-19.

Alegato now acknowledges that she has become a long-hauler. maliit na tasks o yung mga routine

mabilis kong nakakalimutan napag-usapan na sa meeting sa morning, nakakalimutan ko na siya by hapon, parang ganoon. So, kailangan kong isulat lahat basically para maalala ko (Even the small or routine tasks I’d quickly forget. What was discussed in a meeting in the morning, I’d forget in the afternoon. I basically have to write everything down for me to remember.),” she told The Times.

Alegato would have episodes of short-term memory loss, cognitive problems, and difficulty in concentrating three to four times a week.

“Parang lutang. I actually catch myself dissociating more after I recovered from Covid, like bigla na lang akong natutulala kahit during meetings at may kausap ako. Kahit normal activity lang, kunwari kumakain, tapos bigla na lang akong matutula. Tapos ayun, sa meetings ... mako-call out ako, hindi ko sinasadya dissociated ako (It’s like I was drugged ... it’s like I become wool-headed even during meetings and when talking to someone. While eating, for example, I’d go into some kind of stupor. During meetings, I’d be called out and it’s not like I wanted to because I was dissociated.),” she said.

The long-hauler symptoms subsided after Alegato got her full dose of the Moderna vaccine in August. She has also been regularly taking medications for her mental condition as prescribed by her psychiatrist.

“One to two times a week may mga small things akong nakakalimutan pero short-term memory loss talaga siya (One to two times a week I’d forget small things but it really is short-term memory loss),” she said.

Alegato also said she has recurrent skin rashes after she had her Covid-19 shots.

The case of Maro Abigpa, 25, from Santolan, Pasig City, is more complicated. He contracted Covid-19 twice, first testing positive on July 31, 2020, recovering after a month, and then becoming infected with the Delta variant on July 6, 2021, after which he recovered in nine days.

A severe case of Covid-19 can lead to scarring and other permanent lung problems. In Ali-gada’s case the mild infections caused persistent shortness of breath or getting winded easily after even light exertion.

Abigpa believes his lungs may have been