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Abstract

Title

COVID-19, LONG-COVID AND RETURN-TO-WORK: THE EXPERIENCE OF ITALIAN OCCUPATIONAL PHYSICIANS ON MUSCULOSKELETAL SYMPTOMS AND OCCUPATIONAL ERGONOMIC RISKS

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INTRODUCTION

Musculoskeletal symptoms are among the recognized health complaints reported by subjects affected by Long COVID (1). Furthermore, return-to-work (RTW) after COVID-19 can be a specific issue in case of occupational exposure to ergonomic risk factors (2).

METHODS

A questionnaire-based investigation has been performed in a pilot group of Occupational Physicians (OPs) from an Italian region, to collect data on Long-COVID and COVID-19-related RTW issues of workers included in health surveillance programs (3).

RESULTS

All the OPs (n=13) reported of having examined workers with possible Long-COVID symptoms. The 54% of them believes that Long-COVID is still a frequent issue for the workers (as of March 2023), even if less severe compared to the initial stages of the pandemic. The questionnaire investigates 23 Long-COVID symptoms, asking the OPs to indicate the most frequent among the workers they follow, and then the most relevant (frequency+severity): the 62 and the 39% of the OPs indicated "asthenia", respectively as the most frequent and the most relevant. Only one of the OPs reported joints and/or musculoskeletal pains as the most relevant symptom. Considering RTW issues, the 62% of the OPs reported that the main problems were related to conditions of frailty of the workers with respect to the COVID-19 risk. OPs revealed that almost all the workers they examined were fit to work, but in the 77% of the cases they needed to indicate specific limitations related to the job activity: in the majority (=46%) of the cases these limitations were related to the manual handling of heavy loads.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the direct experience of OPs involved in occupational health surveillance programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, this pilot survey shows that asthenia is the most frequent Long-COVID symptom for workers, while only the 7% of the OPs reported joints/musculoskeletal complaints as the most relevant Long-COVID symptom. The main occupational risk posing issues when evaluating the RTW of the workers was that of the manual handling of heavy loads, indicated by the 46% of the OPs.

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