

Covid made long: examining the embodiment of the social and material effects of SARS-CoV-2 infection, adaptation and recovery

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Background:

In this paper, we investigate how Covid is 'made long'. We conceptualise Long Covid as not only encompassing the manifestation of multiple biomedical effects of SARS-CoV-2 infection, but also as the embodiment of the social and material effects of illness over time and through the pandemic.

Methods:

To make our analysis, we draw on the interview accounts of patients (n=39) generated inside a prospective observational cohort study at St Vincent's Hospital Sydney (the ADAPT study). Interviews were undertaken at three time points, up to 24 months post-infection, generating in-depth qualitative accounts of the social and embodied effects of Covid-19 and its recovery in real time and in the longer-term.

Results:

Through analysis of patients' accounts, we attend to how Covid is 'made long' through the disturbance of lifeways and relations – in bodily capacities and functioning, in social worlds, in work and family life – precipitating adaptation and change. This disturbance is lived in new ways, as experiments in how living might be done, as patients navigate and make their uncertain recovery.

Conclusion:

We argue that Covid and its multiple and enduring effects are not fixed in shape but become together in an assemblage, thus resisting a separation between Long Covid as a 'scientific thing' on the one hand and 'lived experience' on the other, and accentuating the relations between. We suggest that this allows for a more critical, and more careful, way of knowing the multiple emergent effects of SARS-CoV-2 infection. To conclude we reflect on how, through our longitudinal work with the cohort, attending to how Covid is 'made long' gains relevance not just as an object of but also as a means of enquiry, that is, as an evidence-making intervention.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

We thank the ADAPT participants who generously gave their time and energy to work in dialogue with us. We are also grateful to the St Vincent's Hospital Sydney

ADAPT Study Protocol Steering Committee, research team and project coordinators.