America’s Looming Health Crisis: COVID Patients Who Never Recover

APRIL 15, 2020 -- The virus COVID-19 is anticipated to infect as many as 214 million Americans, cause the hospitalization of 21 million people, and 3.5 million Americans may never return to health, resulting in a cost of over $48 billion annually for the rest of their lives in lost productivity and increased medical costs.

“These symptoms were very reminiscent of CFS/ME... While the current covid-19 pandemic is caused by a different virus, it is a member of the same coronavirus family, so it might also cause a post-viral fatigue syndrome. That’s what I’m worried about.”

- Dr. Harvey Moldofsky, Institute of Medical Science at the University of Toronto

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) is a classified as a neurological disease by the World Health Organization and is known for afflicting people following viral infections.

1. Some COVID-19 patients are exhibiting ME/CFS-like symptoms (nearly 35% of patients)
2. Coronaviruses trigger ME/CFS. Experts are estimating significant surges in ME/CFS cases following the pandemic, up to 3,570,000 new ME/CFS cases, more than doubling the existing cases in the United States in 36 months.
3. ME/CFS epidemics have historically followed viral outbreaks, such as the current COVID-19 epidemic.
4. Our frontline responders are not equipped to identify and diagnose post-viral neuroimmune disease.

In the past 4 years, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have grown the field of ME/CFS research and built a network of disease experts and scientists at the leading edge of the field of post-viral neuroimmune diagnostics and treatment. Given the clear connection to the COVID-19 crisis, the ME/CFS research community is an untapped scientific resource that will be vital to existing COVID-19 scientific, diagnostic, and treatment efforts.

COVID-19 Response Recommendation

Solve M.E. is calling for immediate congressional action to enable current NIH ME/CFS research programs to tackle these new neuroimmune related COVID-19 challenges. Solve M.E. recommends:

- Authorization and appropriation of at least $15 million a year over 4 years to the Director of the NIH to conduct and support post-viral neuroimmune disease research
- Research focus on diagnosis, treatment, and risk factors of post-viral chronic neuroimmune diseases; specifically ME/CFS, COVID-19 patients exhibiting ME/CFS symptoms, and survivors of COVID-19 with ME/CFS.
- NIH should implement:
  1. post-viral neuroimmune disease data collection and sharing;
  2. new and expanded current Collaborative Research Centers to meet COVID-19 goals;
  3. launching (or expanding) NIH intramural ME/CFS research to incorporate COVID-19 patients;
  4. new ME/CFS and COVID-19 disease specific competitive funding opportunities with set-aside funds, prioritizing new and early career researchers.
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About Solve ME/CFS Initiative

Founded in 1987, Solve ME/CFS Initiative (Solve M.E.) is the national non-profit disease organization representing ME/CFS researchers, patients, and caregivers in the US. Our mission is to make this devastating disease widely understood, diagnosable, and treatable. **Solve M.E. is the largest US provider of private competitive research funding exclusively for ME/CFS.** Our investments and programs accelerate the discovery of safe and effective treatments for ME/CFS, work aggressively toward expansion of research funds, and engages the ME/CFS community in research, advocacy and patient support.

www.SolveME.org

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