

COVID-19 long-term toll signals billions in healthcare costs ahead

With mounting evidence that some COVID-19 complications, healthcare costs could reach billions of dollars

Reuters | New York

Late in March, Laura Gross, 72, was recovering from gall bladder surgery in her Fort Lee, New Jersey, home when she became sick again.

Her throat, head and eyes hurt, her muscles and joints ached and she felt like she was in a fog. Her diagnosis was COVID-19. Four months later, these symptoms remain.

Gross sees a primary care doctor and specialists including a cardiologist, pulmonologist, endocrinologist, neurologist, and gastroenterologist.

"I've had a headache since April. I've never stopped running a low-grade temperature," she said.

Studies of COVID-19 patients keep uncovering new complications associated with the disease.

With mounting evidence that some COVID-19 survivors face months, or possibly years, of debilitating complications, healthcare experts are beginning to study possible long-term costs.

Bruce Lee of the City University of New York (CUNY) Public School of Health estimated that 10 per cent of the US population contracts the virus. One-year post-hospitalization costs would be at \$50 billion, before factoring in longer-term and lingering health problems. Without a vaccine, if 10 per cent of the population became infected, that cost would balloon to \$204 billion.

Some countries hit hard by the new coronavirus - including the United States, Britain and Italy - are considering whether these long-term effects could be considered a "post-COVID syndrome," according to Reuters interviews with about a dozen doctor health economists.

Some US and Italian hospitals have created centers devoted to the care of these patients and are studying follow-up measures.

Britain's Department of Health and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are each leading national studies of COVID-19's long-term impact. An international panel of doctors will suggest standards for mid- and long-term care of recovered patients, the World Health Organization (WHO) in August.

Years before the cost is known

More than 17 million people have been infected with the new coronavirus worldwide, about a quarter of them in the United States.

Healthcare experts say it will be years before the full costs for those who have recovered can be calculated, not unlike the slow recognition of the health impacts to first responders of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City.

They stem from COVID-19's toll on multiple organs, including heart, lung and kidney damage that



A healthcare worker conducts a COVID-19 test at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in the Harlem neighborhood of New York.



Fake blood is seen in test tubes labelled with the coronavirus.

OBIT

The politician's campaign for peace was seen as a driving force behind an end to 25 years of sectarian conflict in the territory

John Hume, champion of peace

Reuters | Belfast

John Hume, a Catholic nationalist and Nobel peace laureate who died on Monday aged 83, will be remembered as a man who championed peace even during the darkest days of Northern Ireland's guerrilla war.

His home in Londonderry looked out on the Bogside, a Catholic zone which was racked by bombs and bullets as Irish Republican Army (IRA) gunmen battled British troops.

Just across the border in the Irish Republic, his hideaway holiday home by the placid waters of Lough Foyle, in County Donegal, was full of mementos of a lifetime's struggle.

A text of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, given to Hume by the U.S. civil rights leader's wife Coretta, was a personal treasure.

"The reason I went into public life in the North (of Ireland) was to work to try and solve the problem... I didn't go in there to get myself a job," he told Reuters in an interview.

Hume, a former teacher who rejected violence as a means to achieve his goal of a united Ireland, was rewarded in December 1998 with the Nobel Peace Prize, which he shared with David Trimble, the British-ruled province's moderate Protestant leader who had decided the future lay in co-operation with Catholics.

Northern Ireland's Good Friday peace deal, signed in April 1998, was a personal triumph for Hume and holds firm today.

It was the culmination of a lonely, and often reviled, quest to bring Northern Ireland the stability that had eluded it since the island was partitioned in 1922.

As leader of the moderate Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), Hume helped kick-start the peace process in the late 1980s by secretly meeting Gerry Adams, leader of the IRA's political ally, Sinn Fein.

He was fiercely criticised when those contacts became public in 1993. In the Irish Republic, Hume was accused of making common cause with paramilitaries, while a senior Northern Irish unionist politician said he had "sold his soul to the Devil".

Hume said he did not care "two balls of roasted snow" about the criticism, and he felt vindicated when his initiative led to the first IRA ceasefire in 1994.

"Not about flag-waving"

Hume was born in Londonderry in January 1937 at the height of the Depression, the son of an unemployed riveter.

His father, who was his hero, urged him to avoid narrow nationalist chauvinism "because you can't eat a flag".

"What he was saying is what I am saying today, that real politics are not about flag-waving. They are about providing bread on your table and a roof over your head," he said.

Hume joined the civil rights movement in 1968 and fought against discrimination in everything from housing to education, just as the "The Troubles", Northern Ireland's 30 years of sectarian



John Hume, second from right.