From confusion to comas: ? of hospitalized COVID patients suffered deteriorating neurological function

Nearly a third of hospitalized Covid-19 patients experienced some type of altered mental function — ranging from confusion to delirium to unresponsiveness — in the largest study to date of neurological symptoms among coronavirus patients in an American hospital system.

And patients with altered mental function had significantly worse medical outcomes, according to the study, published on [October 5] in Annals of Clinical and Translational Neurology. The study looked at the records of the first 509 coronavirus patients hospitalized, from March 5 to April 6, at 10 hospitals in the Northwestern Medicine health system in the Chicago area.

These patients stayed three times as long in the hospital as patients without altered mental function.

After they were discharged, only 32 percent of the patients with altered mental function were able to handle routine daily activities like cooking and paying bills, said Dr. Igor Koralnik, the senior author of the study.

Patients with altered mental function — the medical term is encephalopathy — were also nearly seven times as likely to die as those who did not have that type of problem.

... The researchers did not identify a cause for the encephalopathy, which can occur with other diseases, especially in older patients, and can be triggered by several different factors including inflammation and effects on blood circulation, said Dr. Koralnik.