Recovery is elusive for this COVID longhauler

Since getting sick with the coronavirus in March, Mr. Long, 54, has fallen into a distressing new cycle — one that so far has landed him in the hospital seven times.

Periodically since his initial five-day hospitalization, his lungs begin filling again; he starts coughing uncontrollably and runs a low fever. Roughly 18 days later, he spews up greenish-yellow fluid, signaling yet another bout of pneumonia.

Soon, his oxygen levels drop and his heart rate accelerates to compensate, sending him to a hospital near his home in Clarkston, Mich., for several days, sometimes in intensive care.

"This will never go away," he said, describing his worst fear. "This will be my going-forward for the foreseeable future."

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Nearly a year into the pandemic, it's clear that recovering from Covid-19's initial onslaught can be an arduous, uneven journey. Now, studies reveal that a significant subset of patients are having to return to hospitals, sometimes repeatedly, with complications triggered by the disease or by the body's efforts to defeat the virus.

Even as vaccines give hope for stopping the spread of the virus, the surge of new cases portends repeated hospitalizations for more patients, taxing medical resources and turning some people's path to recovery into a Sisyphean odyssey that upends their lives.

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