Background: Recently evolved from a monochromic flu-like disease to a poly-syndromic “spectrum of disease,” our understanding of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is still far from being complete [1]. Hyperinflammation involving not only the lungs but also the musculoskeletal system, skin, cardiovascular, genitourinary systems is immune-mediated resembling the flares of a full-blown rheumatic disease [2,3].

Objectives: To describe the prevalence and type of rheumatic manifestations in a cohort of COVID-19 patients hospitalized in the COVID-19 rheumatology department in University Hospital St. Marina, Varna, Bulgaria.

Methods: In the present single-center cohort study, a retrospective database analysis was performed among all COVID-19 patients hospitalized from 1 Dec 2020 to 22 Jan 2021. All 243 patients (age 19-93 years) were treated for moderate or severe SARS-CoV-2 infection confirmed by laboratory tests, including positive polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, and imaging modality. Inpatient treatment included antibiotics, dexamethasone, anticoagulants, and antiviral drug remdesivir (optional). Detailed disease history and clinical examination were carried out by a fully certified rheumatologist and/or specialist in internal medicine.

Results: Among all 243 COVID-19 patients, those with prominent self-reported myalgia and arthralgia were 26% (n = 63) and 21.3% (n = 52), respectively. We had 4 (1.6%) cases of newly developed cutaneous vasculitis and 2 (0.8%) cases of severe Raynaud’s phenomenon after SARS-CoV-2 infection onset. Two patients experienced severe muscle weakness, had elevated creatine phosphokinase, and were diagnosed with inflammatory myopathy secondary to COVID-19. Lupus-like syndrome was observed in 2 (0.8%) patients.

Conclusion: Rheumatic manifestations are part of the heterogeneous spectrum of COVID-19 disease. Amidst the COVID-19 crisis, each newly onset rheumatic manifestation warrants exclusion of SARS-CoV-2 infection. Therefore, a rheumatologist should be a part of a multidisciplinary approach towards the COVID-19 treatment.

REFERENCES: