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Student demands support from Sturgeon after brain fog, fatigue and shortness of breath made it impossible for her to graduate

A Scottish student struck down by long Covid has issued a passionate plea to Nicola Sturgeon on behalf of those battling the debilitating condition, saying she has been "robbed" of her future and independence.

Freja Lundberg from Inverness was due to graduate from the University of Aberdeen this summer, with a first-class honours degree in geography and international relations.

But after catching the virus during her January exams, she became one of thousands of Scots

Freja Lundberg from Inverness



stuck down by long Covid. Issues of brain fog, fatigue and shortness of breath have made it impossible for the diligent student to graduate.

"Long Covid has taken my independence and robbed me of my future," said the 23-year-old student. "I feel like I have been written off."

Worried that cases will surge as mainland Scotland moves to level zero on Monday, Ms Lundberg has written to Ms Sturgeon demanding more support for people struggling with long Covid.

"The government needs to rethink their strategy for

long Covid patients," she said. "Numbers are only going to grow and there is nothing in place to properly support us."

"My life has been on pause since January and I have been left, able to do little beyond moving from my bed to the couch. We deserve better."

In January, Ms Lundberg became one of 439 positive cases recorded across the Highland Council area in the first week of the year. This spike in infections came as the Covid rate across Inverness rocketed at the height of the pandemic's second wave.

"To start with all I had was a

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a sore throat," said Ms Lundberg. "But on Saturday I started to get chest pains and it became a big effort to breathe."

The chest pain continued and by Monday, January 18, the student was taken to the accident and emergency department at Raigmore Hospital.

"Walking from the car to the hospital door was exhausting" she said. "I wasn't convinced I could have managed it without collapsing."

Ms Lundberg was able to return home the same day, but due to the severity of her chest pain, she was placed on the hospital's Covid home monitoring team.

More than five months on, her symptoms have not improved. She suffers from fatigue, memory issues and "brain fog", increased heart rate, loss of appetite and has been prescribed regular Tramadol to control her severe chest pain.

She has also lost five stone, dropping three dress sizes."

"I haven't been able to keep up with university," she said, "I sleep for 16 hours a day and have to concentrate on breathing."

"The chest pain increases when I speak so I haven't been able to talk much and the brain fog and memory issues means my mind will go blank."

Ms Lundberg has also received a preliminary diagnosis of Postural tachycardia syndrome (PoTS) – a condition affecting blood flow.

"When I stand up, my vision goes and I feel dizzy," she said. "If I continue to stand



upright I pass out. So I can't really stand or walk." The young woman has spent the past six months in solitude, unable to walk, speak, or even think without getting a headache.

Stripped of her independence and future, Ms Lundberg said: "My life has been put on pause since January. I've been incapable of doing anything."

Ms Lundberg is one of two million people in the UK thought to be suffering from long Covid.

With research into the condition still relatively new, the government has invested £2.5 million in Scottish-led research to learn more about the condition and ascertain its long-term impact on people.

Nine projects are underway examining various aspects, including the frequency, nature and impact of long Covid in the Scottish population.

The number of vaccinations given out in Scotland reached a three-month low on Monday with 17,749 injections, including 7,163 first doses, administered.

National clinical director

Professor Jason Leitch subsequently appealed to young people to come forward for the injection as soon as possible, saying "to get out the end of the pandemic, globally and in Scotland, we need big population immunity numbers".

Ms Lundberg said: "It's important to fund research, but at the same time people like me, who are living with long Covid, can't wait years for the results. We need help now."

Ms Lundberg has grown frustrated with the lack of services available to her and said the government has focused funds only on acute, short-term Covid patients.

She said: "I expected there to be medical support in place, but I have been abandoned by the health system."

"My GP tried to refer me to cardiology, respiratory and infectious diseases, but none of them took the referrals despite my symptoms because I was a Covid patient."

"They also tried to refer me to the long Covid team in Raigmore, but they are only taking patients who were hospitalised so they wouldn't see me."



Freja Lundberg from Inverness is a keen traveller the student spend much of her time exploring far away places before the pandemic hit. Inset, National clinical director Professor Jason Leitch

Desperate for help, Ms Lundberg wrote to Ms Sturgeon asking for more specialist clinics to be made.

But was left "dismayed" by the First Minister's response, which said we must "learn more about this condition" before we consider a move to create more specialist clinics.

A government spokesperson said: "Whilst long Covid clinics are one model that NHS boards may explore, we know no one single approach is likely to fit all areas and circumstances."

"We are keeping all aspects under review, including specialist services and funding to ensure people suffering from long Covid

receive the best possible care and support.""

Ms Lundberg has begun receiving counselling for her anxiety and depression after the impact of long Covid caused her to develop thoughts of self harm.

She said that it was "complete frustration" at the lack of help available to her that had taken the biggest toll on her mental health.

"I've gone to Nicola Sturgeon, but I've got nowhere," she said.

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: "We recognise the impact long Covid has on physical and mental wellbeing and we are working to ensure people have access to the support they need for assessment, diagnosis, care and rehabilitation and in a setting that is as close to their home as possible."

"While long Covid is a relatively new condition, we have already developed an approach in responding to it."

"We are strengthening the existing services offered by our NHS, partnering with the third sector and investing £2.5m in Scottish-led research."



'My life has been on pause since January. I've been incapable of doing anything'