

Historical Background

It has been recognised for more than 100 years that new muscle weakness can occur in survivors of polio many years after their initial illness. The first descriptions were published in the French medical literature in 1875 by Jean-Martin Charcot. Since this time, other sporadic reports have appeared in the literature describing new weakness, atrophy and fasciculations occurring years after an episode of acute paralytic poliomyelitis.³⁸ It was not until the early 1980s however, that LEOP became widely acknowledged.

By 1984, a growing awareness of LEOP prompted researchers to organise an international conference at the Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation in the United States of America. The term “Post-Polio Syndrome” was coined around this time. The second international meeting was held at the Warm Springs Institute in 1986 and in the following years there was a dramatic increase in clinical research into the long-term effects of polio.²⁵

In 1994, the New York Academy of Sciences and the National Institute of Health co-sponsored another international meeting that culminated in the publication of a special issue of the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences: “The Post-Polio Syndrome: Advances in Pathogenesis and Treatment”. This conference signalled the acceptance of post-polio syndrome as a legitimate clinical entity.³⁹