

## Patient information

### Leaving the Intensive Therapy Unit and Going to a Ward

#### Critical Care Department – Royal Liverpool Hospital

This information is a guide to some of the things that may affect you after you leave the Critical Care Unit (CCU). When you have been ill and in CCU, it may take time for you to return to your normal self.

#### This may depend upon:

- The length of time you have been ill and how long you have needed to be in CCU.
- Your weight loss since admission to hospital.
- Your state of health before your illness.
- Some patients will remember all, part or none of their experience in CCU. Their sense of reality may have been distorted.

#### Going to the ward

Being transferred from the CCU may be a worrying time, both for you and your family. It is quite normal to feel apprehensive, as you and your family have become familiar with the staff and the routine in the Critical Care Unit.

The CCU staff will inform the ward medical and nursing staff about the care and treatment you have had while on CCU and a progress report will have been passed on. You will be transferred onto a different bed and the nurse will accompany you to the ward.

#### What to expect on the ward

- You will notice there are fewer nurses for each patient compared to CCU.
- You will not have one nurse looking after you, as you had on the CCU.
- A nurse call bell (buzzer system) is available for you to use and the nurses will be with you as quickly as possible.
- You may have a bed in a single room or in a four or six bedded room.
- Bedside lockers are provided to keep clothes and personal items in. **(All belongings and valuables are (kept at your own responsibility)).**
- Your family and friends can visit. Visiting times may vary and they should ask on the ward about this. Visits will still be tiring so we suggest you keep your visitors to two at a time until you feel stronger.

## **Changes in mood**

### **Some former CCU patients comment on their changing moods:**

feeling depressed or irritable. These are normal reactions after being very ill and they will go with time. Discussing your experiences can help you understand what has happened and assist in your recovery. It may take a while for you, your family and friends to come to terms with what has happened to you. It may have been a difficult time for everyone involved.

You may feel weak and get tired easily. How this affects you will depend upon your illness.

### **This is because:**

- Your muscles quickly weaken due to being in bed and not being used. Muscles may take several months to get back to full power.
- You may be unsteady on your feet - you may feel frightened to do certain things. If you discuss this with the ward staff they will/can reassure you about what to expect in your recovery.
- Every person is different and it's hard to say when you will feel fully fit again. You will have to gradually increase your activity over the following days or weeks at first and may need help from the nurses or the physiotherapist.
- Exercise will be increased - the physiotherapist will also advise you (some simple exercises have been provided at the end of the booklet).
- If you suffer some pain that limits you, please tell the ward staff and they will help.
- As a rough guide, you should not feel your heart racing during these exercises and although you may become a little breathless, you should still be able to talk.

## **Sleep**

- You may find your sleep pattern has changed. It may be more difficult to fall asleep or your sleep may be broken. Be patient, as this comes back in time.
- As an ITU patient, your sleep pattern was disrupted, because there is little difference between night and day.
- Returning to a normal sleep pattern may therefore take a while.
- Some drugs you received in ITU may have contributed to your sleep pattern being disrupted.
- Some ITU patients experience nightmares or strange dreams while in Critical Care Unit, which may continue on the ward, or even beyond.
- Occasionally, the dreams are distressing and disturbing and are likely to be caused by a combination of the drugs you received, altered hormone levels and your disrupted sleep pattern. Discuss your experiences with the ward doctors and nurses and the follow-up nurse. These dreams or nightmares should subside over a few days or weeks.
- As you recover, your sleep pattern will improve as you increase your activity.

## How you can help yourself

- Try having a hot drink, but avoid tea or coffee late at night.
- Reading, or listening to music, and not sleeping in the day can also help. **If you can't sleep, please discuss this with the staff.**

## Eating and drinking

- Since being unwell, you may have lost weight and your appetite might have changed. The loss of appetite is a temporary change and will return to normal with time. At first you might find food tastes odd.
- If you need help with eating and drinking, nurses, relatives and friends can assist until you are able to feed yourself again.
- A sensible balanced diet is an essential part of your recovery, sometimes high energy food supplements (drinks) may be advised.

## Changes in your body

As a result of your illness your appearance may have changed. You might notice some thinning of your hair, weight loss and dryness of your skin.

These changes are almost always temporary and will return to normal. You may also have scars which you feel are unsightly, these will fade over the following months and may not seem as obvious.

## Your family, friends and relationships

Your family and friends will have suffered stress and upset whilst you have been ill. Seeing you surrounded by machines will have made them feel helpless. Your family and friends are obviously delighted you are getting better, but they may be overprotective and not want you to do things.

Talking about what has happened can be beneficial to both you and your family. The nurse, doctor or physiotherapist may be able to help by discussing your progress and what can be expected of you. The follow-up nurse is also available.

You and your partner might be concerned about the possible effect of your illness on the physical side of your relationship.

You might be concerned that physical relationships with your partner may be harmful to your recovery. This is rare, but as with all exercise, you should take things at your own pace. It may take some time and patience from both partners to return to a normal relationship. If your problems continue to worry you, seek advice from your family doctor (GP).

## Help and advice

Often illness can cause financial difficulties. Your nurse can arrange for you to see a Hospital Social Worker who will discuss any problems you have in complete confidence.

## **Stress**

The recovery period after illness can be stressful. Your own particular illness will of course influence this and may not be relevant to all.

Some of the symptoms of stress have been mentioned already in the booklet, including; disturbed sleep, lack of energy, loss of appetite, moods and depression. These symptoms may occur as a result of your CCU stay or they may happen as a result of you being under stress.

Feeling stressed after the experience you have been through is understandable. It takes time to recover from this. The degrees of stress and how long it lasts varies from person to person. Feeling stressed usually resolves with time, as you become stronger and return to your normal lifestyle.

A few people experience severe symptoms of stress and feel they cannot cope with life. In these cases, seeking advice from health professionals is essential. This form of stress does not get better without help from qualified counsellors or professionals trained to deal with this problem.

## **Physiotherapy**

Exercises should be done at regular intervals, little and often. You should not force the movement, work gently into the range at which pain starts (if that is present) trying to move a little further each time. Exercise should be repeated ten times on two to three different occasions throughout the day.

Deep breathing exercises are also helpful. Lie on the bed and place your hands on your lower ribs. Take a breath in through the nose and let out through the mouth. Repeat this three times.

## **Shoulders**

- You may find your exercises are easier after a warm bath as shoulder muscles may be relaxed. Shrug your shoulders up to your ears and then push down as far as possible.
- Clasp both hands in front and keeping your elbows as straight as possible, lift them up above your head. This exercise is best done either lying or seated in an upright chair.

## **Ankle and Foot Exercises**

- Relax leg. Gently bend and straighten ankle. Move through full range of motion.
- Slowly rotate foot/ankle clockwise and counter-clockwise.
- Gradually increase range of motion. Avoid pain.
- Sitting on a chair, with your thigh well supported and your feet touching the floor at right angles, then straighten one leg fully. You may need to use the other leg to give support at the back of the ankle.
- Additional exercises and advice may be given on the ward by your physiotherapist.

## **Feedback**

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated

## **Further Information**

**If you are not invited to The Critical Care Unit follow-up appointment and would like to discuss some aspects of your Intensive Therapy Unit stay or have questions regarding your stay and recovery, please feel free to contact:**

**Royal Liverpool University Hospital  
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