ICU patient diaries

Information for relatives

This leaflet explains the benefits of keeping a diary for your relative whilst they are on the intensive care unit (ICU).

What is a patient diary?

Patients often have little or no memory of their time on the ICU. Their memory can be affected by their illness or by the medications we give to keep them comfortable. Sometimes patients may recall nightmares or hallucinations from this time, which can be frightening. Although the doctors and the nurses explain to patients why they were admitted to the ICU, patients often forget what we have told them. Research suggests that this can cause patients to become stressed and anxious.

To help patients understand more about their illness and their time on the ICU, we have therefore introduced patient diaries – a written and/or photographic record of your relative’s time on the ICU.

How does it work?

The nursing staff will start to keep a diary for your relative, writing down what has been happening during each day. Other healthcare professionals, including doctors and physiotherapists may also contribute. We also encourage family members to write in the diary, to pass on your messages or to relay information from home.

Sometimes we will take photographs. These will be kept separately and will only be included in the diary if your relative consents to this.

What should be written in the diary?

The diary should include information that your relative would normally be interested in. This might be information about home or other relatives, news and current affairs, or any emotional messages you’d like to give them.

When writing in the diary, we ask that you avoid using any language that may cause offence. We also ask that the diary is not used to voice complaints about your relative’s care, as this may cause them unnecessary anxiety and worry when they read it. If you have any concerns about the treatment or care your loved one is receiving, please discuss them with the nurse looking after your relative or with the nurse in charge of the shift.

The patient should be the first person to read the completed diary. Out of respect for your loved one’s privacy, we therefore ask that you do not read the diary entries made by others. Please be assured that the information written by staff members is the same information we will be giving to you when you visit your relative.
**What happens to the diary once my relative is out of ICU?**

Once your relative has been discharged from ICU, his/her diary will be made available to them by the ICU staff. This may be once they are on the general ward, in an ICU follow-up clinic or at some other suitable time. Some patients do not want to read the diary, while others prefer to see the diary but not the photographs. The decision lies with the patient, and staff and relatives should be respectful of this. The patient will be required to sign a form identifying their wishes for the diary.

*Please remember that the diary remains hospital property until it is handed over to the patient and they have signed a consent form. Diaries must not be taken away from the bedside by family members.*

**Contact us**

If you have any questions or concerns about your relative’s patient diary, please do not hesitate to speak to the nurse looking after your relative. For more general concerns, please call the intensive care unit on **020 8725 1307**.

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**Additional services**

**Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**
PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer). **Tel:** 020 8725 2453  **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

**NHS Choices**
NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.  
**Web:** www.nhs.uk

**NHS 111**
You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it’s not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones. **Tel:** 111