

Psychological Care in Critical Care

This leaflet is for patients and their relatives who are or have received care through the Critical Care Services at East Sussex Healthcare Trust.

This information explains how and why emotions and psychological health can be affected by critical care and what support is available; including support from the Critical Care Unit's Clinical Health Psychologist

Psychological Experiences during Critical Care Stay

Critical Care can be a frightening place for patients, their families and friends. In the first few days of a critical care stay the medical treatment a person requires may affect their body and mind.

- You may not be able to remember much of what happened
- You may experience altered perception of what is happening around you, including hallucinations, nightmares or dreams that can seem very real and frightening
- The effects of the illness and medication can lead to confusion, and some patients feel paranoid that they are trapped, and people are trying to hurt them as they try to make sense of what is happening around them
- You may experience fears and worries and feel vulnerable
- If you stay longer than a few days you might start to feel down, lonely or frustrated
- The fear these experiences cause can remain for weeks after you have been transferred to a general ward or discharged from hospital

Psychological Recovery after Critical Care Stay

After being critically ill, it might take many months for you to fully recover physically and psychologically.

Your physical recovery is likely to impact upon how you are feeling – you may at first feel weak and it may require more effort to do previously simple tasks, such as getting dressed and moving about. This can make some people feel low as they do not feel 'back to their old selves'. It can also sometimes feel frustrating if you need a lot of help from other people (family, friends, carers) at this early stage.

Many people also think about what brought them into critical care in the first place, and can feel quite emotional as they come to terms with this.

Common Psychological Experiences Post Critical Care

It is not unusual to feel the following in the first month or two:

- Feeling upset and tearful
- Feeling guilty for the worry everyone experienced
- Feeling tired
- Vivid dreams, nightmares, or 'flashbacks'
- Feeling snappy or irritable
- Feeling like you have changed as a person, and wondering if you will feel the same again
- Loss of confidence

- Not fully remembering what happened in critical care
- Feeling scared that you almost died
- Not returning to your 'normal' sleeping pattern/loss of appetite
- Having strange memories of critical care
- Worrying about getting ill again

Family and Friend's Responses

Families and friends will be pleased to have you home again but may not fully understand why you may feel like you do. Please talk to them about how you feel, and share with them this leaflet to help them to understand the common psychological experiences of being in critical care.

What Can Help Me Cope?

Sleep: You need regular sleep to keep your body healthy. It can also take time to get back to a normal sleep routine. You may find it harder to fall asleep, or you may often wake during the night. If you have trouble sleeping your GP can give you advice, but things should return to normal as you become stronger and more active.

Managing Stress and Anxiety: As you get better and start doing more, you will face new challenges. They can make you feel scared - try to keep calm and take slow, deep breaths. Talk to your family and friends so they can support you in the way you need.

Pacing: It can take time to recover physically, try to pace your physical activity and do not rush yourself. Your strength should slowly return as you re-build your activity levels.

Critical Care Follow-Up Clinic: This is a clinic run by critical care staff, which follows up patients in the months after being discharged from the unit. The aim of the clinic is to ensure patients and families are receiving the ongoing support they need. This is held fortnightly at Bexhill and you will receive an invite to this service.

ICU STEPS: Is a registered charity, run by critical care staff and dedicated to supporting the needs of former patients in critical care and their relatives. Groups are held in both Eastbourne and Hastings approximately every six weeks. Please ask the critical care staff (in person or phone) for more information and dates.

Critical Care Diary: If your stay in critical care was longer than three days, the staff caring for you will have completed a daily diary for you. Reading it can help you understand what happened. It may take a while before you feel ready to read it, and it can be very emotional, but many patients often say it helped them.

Clinical Health Psychology Service for Critical Care

Clinical Health Psychologists specialise in helping people cope with the psychological aspects of living with a serious and/ or chronic physical illness, distressing medical/ hospital experience.

Clinical Health Psychologists spend a minimum of six years training before qualifying and are approved by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). Psychologists are not medical doctors like psychiatrists; they do not prescribe medicine and do not admit people to hospital.

A Clinical Health Psychologist will listen to what you have to say, explore your problems and concerns. They will work with you to focus on your strengths and resources to find ways to cope and manage alongside the demands of the physical ill health you have or are continuing to experience.

How can a Clinical Health Psychologist help?

- Manage distressing thoughts and feelings
- Make more sense of experiences you describe from your critical care stay and now you have been discharged
- Consider the impact of the illness on yourself and those around you
- Look at how to harness your existing strengths in coping
- Develop new approaches to coping and to see how they work out in practise
- Work on the best ways for you to communicate with the people around you
- Cope with the uncertainty of future health and treatment
- Adjust to everyday life whilst living with the effects of your health condition (if applicable)

When and how can I access the Clinical Health Psychology Service?

Most psychological symptoms will reduce by themselves after a few weeks. However, if you are still experiencing symptoms described in this leaflet, after one month from discharge from hospital, please contact the staff at the unit. We have a dedicated Clinical Health Psychologist in Critical Care to support you. You can ask any member of the Critical Care Team to refer you to the Clinical Health Psychologist. Alternatively, the Psychology Service contact number is below.

Sources of information

Clinical Health Psychology Office Hours:

Conquest Hospital – Wednesday to - Friday - 10.00am to 6.00pm

Eastbourne DGH – Monday to Tuesday – 10.00am to 6.00pm

Direct Psychology Telephone: 07391 415557

Acknowledgements

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Important information

This patient information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4731 (direct dial) or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4434 Email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:
Rebecca Coles –Gale - Highly Specialist Clinical Psychologist

The Clinical Specialty/Unit that have agreed this patient information leaflet:
Clinical Psychology
Critical Care

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Responsible clinician/author: Rebecca Coles-Gale - Highly Specialist Clinical Psychologist

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