

Patient information

High dependency unit (HDU) or intensive care unit (ICU admission) after planned or emergency surgery

Introduction

This leaflet is designed to provide information for those undergoing major surgery. Some of those undergoing major surgery may have a higher surgical risk either due to the procedure they are having or their pre-existing medical conditions or a combination of the two.

You have been provided with this leaflet as there is a possibility that you may require a higher level of care following your operation. This may have been pre-planned; in which case you should have been informed by the anaesthetist you saw in the pre-assessment clinic.

What is a higher level of care?

Levels of care in a hospital are defined by the number of nurses per patient and the types of support that you can be given. On most hospital wards there is one nurse for every 6-12 patients. The exact number depends on the type of ward and the time of day. For some patients following surgery you require more input than would be possible in this environment, for example because you need a lot of medication or very regular observations.

Higher levels of care for post operative patients can be provided in one of two places at the West Suffolk Hospital. High dependency (HDU) care is defined as at least one nurse for every two patients. If a short period of HDU care is required, this is most commonly provided in specific areas of the post anaesthetic care unit (PACU). Intensive care unit (ICU) care usually necessitates one nurse per patient. If a longer period of HDU care or ICU level care is anticipated after your surgery then you may be admitted directly to the intensive care unit, bypassing the usual stay in PACU.

What care will I receive on HDU or ICU?

A large part of the care you receive in either HDU or ICU is the close monitoring provided by the nursing staff. The nurses have special training to look after critically unwell patients. There are also doctors, physiotherapists, dieticians, pharmacists and occupational therapists who are specially trained. These professionals will work with your surgical team to ensure your recovery is as smooth as possible.

Rarely for the procedures offered at the West Suffolk Hospital, your anaesthetist may have felt it was safer for your anaesthetic to be continued after the operation. Some people may know this as an 'induced coma'. There are a variety of reasons this may be the case. If this was felt to be necessary, you can be woken up once your condition has been stabilised or in a slower way than would be possible in the operating theatre.

There are more monitors used in the HDU and ICU than in anaesthetics for simpler procedures. These include additional drips into your veins, drips into your artery to monitor your blood pressure with every heartbeat and a urinary catheter to monitor your kidney function.

You may also have regular X-rays and blood tests to monitor your progress.

As you recover the amount of monitoring will be gradually reduced to a level that could be managed on a general surgical ward. Once you reach this point you will be discharged from the HDU or ICU.

Visitors whilst on HDU or ICU

You are able to have visits from family and friends whilst you are on the intensive care unit. Visitors are usually limited to two people at a time. Visitors under 16 may be accommodated at the discretion of the nurse in charge depending on your situation and the situation of other patients on the unit. More information is available in the patient information leaflet "critical care family information".

Your relatives can also call the unit by asking the main hospital switchboard (01284 713000) to put you through for information on visiting times or for updates on your progress. It may be possible to arrange a video call between you and your family depending on your condition and the availability of devices.

After HDU or ICU

It is recognised that patients who spend time on the ICU or HDU for more than a few days may develop both physical and psychological complications. You will therefore be followed up by specially trained staff after you are discharged to pick these problems up early and ensure that they are treated appropriately.

Complications following ICU admission are more likely if your surgery was not planned, if you have a longer admission and if you had a lot of pre-existing medical problems.

More information about the complications of ICU care and follow up is available in separate leaflets and in patient information provided by the faculty of intensive care medicine. The link to the faculty's website is provided at the bottom of this leaflet.

Concerns after discharge

If you have concerns once you are on the ward that you may have problems related to your ICU or HDU stay, let the staff on the ward know and they can contact the appropriate staff for support.

If you have concerns related to your ICU stay after you have gone home, either you or your relatives can contact the intensive care unit. This is through the main hospital switchboard on **01284 713000**. You will need to ask to be put through to the intensive care unit.

If you are concerned, feel unwell or cannot find the hospital number, contact your GP, 111, or come to the hospital emergency department.

More information

You can ask any of the staff at your pre-assessment visit or your anaesthetist on the day of your surgery if you have any questions.

More information is available on the Royal College of Anaesthetists (RCoA) website section for patients. There is a specific leaflet for Major surgery requiring ICU stay is available here: <https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patients/patient-information-resources/leaflets-video-resources/your-anaesthetic-major-surgery>

The Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine also provides a variety of leaflets about different aspects of critical care. These are available in the patient information section of their website at: <https://www.ficm.ac.uk/for-patients>

West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust is actively involved in clinical research. Your doctor, clinical team or the research and development department may contact you regarding specific clinical research studies that you might be interested in participating in. If you do not wish to be contacted for these purposes, please email info.gov@wsh.nsh.uk. This will in no way affect the care or treatment you receive.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo) <https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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References:

1. RCoA Leaflet "Your anaesthetic for major surgery with planned high dependency or intensive care afterwards" available at: <https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patients/patient-information-resources/leaflets-video-resources/your-anaesthetic-major-surgery>
2. FICM patient information leaflets available at: <https://www.ficm.ac.uk/for-patients>