

Treating people who are critically ill

Information for patients

You have been given this information sheet because the doctors and nurses caring for you have asked the intensive care team for advice about your treatment. When someone becomes suddenly very unwell (critically ill), there are different options about what is the right treatment for them. This leaflet is about these options. We hope that this information will help you to understand what is happening, and to take part in discussions about your care. This will help the doctors and nurses make sure you get the treatment that is right for you. You do not need to read this, or take part in any discussions, if you do not want to.



Who are the intensive care team?

The intensive care team are doctors and nurses who look after patients on intensive care units. They are experts in deciding on the best treatments for critically ill patients.

What will the intensive care team do?

To decide what treatment is best for a patient, the first step is to find out about the patient and their illness. A doctor from the intensive care team will come and talk to you. They will also talk to anyone close to you if you would like them to.

The doctor will:

- ask about you and your illness;
- talk to you about what is important to you about your care;
- read your medical notes and look at any test results; and
- examine you.

They will talk to the team who have been looking after you. Together with you and the team they will decide what treatments are best for you.

How do the intensive care team decide what care I need?

Doctors take into account many different things when deciding on the right treatment.

- They look at all the medical information about your illness.
- They look at how you were before becoming very ill, such as whether you were well or if you already had serious problems with your health.
- They gather information about what is important to you about your care and treatment.

The doctors consider all this information and then decide with you what will be the best treatment for you.

Sometimes it is best that treatment and care are given on the ward that you are already on. However, the doctors may recommend that you are cared for on the intensive care unit. The doctors will discuss each option carefully with you, and will recommend the treatment that they think is right for you.

Sometimes if a patient is nearing the end of their life, the best care may be to concentrate on helping their symptoms rather than give treatment to prolong their life. This is sometimes called palliative care. If the doctors and nurses are considering this type of care, they will talk to you about it.

Treatment on the ward

If you do not need treatment on the intensive care unit, you will be cared for on the ward by the ward doctors and nurses. Sometimes specialist critical-care outreach nurses will also help to look after you on the ward.

Treatment in an intensive care unit

An intensive care unit (sometimes called a critical-care unit or high-dependency unit) is a ward in the hospital where patients can have specific medical treatments, such as help with their breathing using a machine or very close observation of drug treatment for their heart. If this type of treatment will help a patient they will be transferred to the intensive care unit.

Intensive care treatments can be harsh and distressing for patients. For some people treatment in intensive care does not work and they may not survive. Some patients have long-term problems after intensive care treatment. This is why doctors need to think carefully about whether intensive care treatment is the best choice for each person.

What should I tell the doctors looking after me about the treatment I want?

The doctors and nurses looking after you want to give the treatment that is right for you. You should tell them about what is troubling you most, and what is important to you. This will help them to make decisions with you that are in your best interests. Please listen carefully to what the doctors and nurses tell you about your condition, and tell them what you would like to happen.

What happens next?

The doctors will talk to you about what treatment they think is right for you. You can ask questions if there is anything you do not understand. The right treatment may be different if your condition changes. The doctors and nurses will watch carefully for any changes and tell you if this happens.

I have a concern about my treatment. What should I do?

Occasionally people have different views on what is the best treatment. Usually these differences are sorted out in a discussion between the patient, their family and the team caring for them. If you have a concern, please ask to speak to the senior doctor or nurse looking after you. If you are still concerned, you can get advice from the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) team in the hospital. The nursing staff can arrange for you or someone close to you to talk to a member of the PALS team.

Where can I find more help and advice?

Our doctors and nurses are here to help you. If you have questions, or need any more information, please ask a member of staff.

The ward team can arrange for someone from the multi-faith team to come and talk with you and offer spiritual support. The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) team can also help you and your family with information and support. (Their number is ...).

PIL v1.1 01.11.16 REC No: 15/WM/0025

This project was funded by the NIHR HS&DR programme (project number 13/10/14)

Developed in conjunction with University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust
