

Understanding the Critical Care Unit (ICU\PCU) A Visitor Guide

When your loved one is in the Critical Care Unit it is normal not to know what to expect. This guide is intended to help you better understand what is happening and what you can do while your loved one is in either the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) or the Progressive Care Unit (PCU).

St. Vincent's Intensive Care Units include:

- **Intensive Care (ICU)** which can be reached by calling 203-576-5663
- **Progressive Care (PCU)** which can be reached by calling 203-576-5008

What Should I Expect?

Your loved one may have multiple tubes and wires in place. Most of the devices you may see are temporary and will be removed as the patient gets better. These tubes and wires are there to help monitor your loved one at all times, day and night.

Ventilators: Your loved one may be on a ventilator, also called a "breathing machine." The ventilator is a temporary machine used to assist with breathing. Your loved one will not be able to speak to you while on the ventilator because of the position of the tube passing the vocal chords.

Noises: All of these tubes, wires and machines are very noisy. Please do not become alarmed with the noises and beeps as they are all very normal sounds you will hear in the ICU and PCU.

Members of the ICU healthcare team

You may see many staff members entering your loved one's room. They all play an important role in delivering the highest standard of care to your loved one.

- **Attending physicians** - Intensivists actively participate in and supervise the care of your loved one.
- **Residents** are doctors who are working in collaboration with attending physicians as part of their training.
- **Registered nurses** care for your loved ones at the bedside around-the-clock.
- **Respiratory therapists** manage breathing needs and oxygen requirements
- **Case managers** organize care and help assess discharge needs.
- **Social workers** support the patient and family during hospitalization and in planning discharge.
- **Pharmacists** collaborate with the team and process medications ordered by the physician.
- **Nutritionists** assess and care for nutritional needs.
- **Secretaries** serve as the means of communication between families and staff.

Visiting a patient in ICU

Although visiting is permitted around the clock for immediate family, there are certain times during the day that we encourage quiet time to promote a restful healing environment for your loved one. Please talk to the nurse for more details. We encourage you to go home and get rest as well, taking care of yourself is very important during this stressful time.

Suggested family guidelines:

- To enter the unit: Please go to the phone located outside the unit you wish to visit. Using the phone on the wall, call the nursing station to visit your loved one. All you need to do is pick up the phone, no dialing is necessary.
- A maximum of three visitors at one time are allowed at the bedside so that the team can access critical equipment and care for your loved one.
- We highly recommend that children under the age of 15 do not visit in the ICU. This is a protection for the children as well as the patients. There are many germs in the hospital setting that children may not have a built-up immunity to fight. The other reason is that many children could have harmful germs to the immunocompromised patient.
- No food or beverages are permitted in the patient rooms.
- There is a waiting room outside of the unit for your comfort. This waiting room has 2 recliners so that you may rest. There is also a small kitchen area with a refrigerator to store food in, a microwave and a coffee maker. Books are there to borrow to help spend long days at the hospital.

During the ICU stay

We recommend purchasing a small notebook to keep at the bedside or with you at all times.

In a notebook, you can keep track of:

1. The names of your healthcare team
2. Important numbers and information
3. Information regarding medications
4. Questions that may arise as you visit your loved one that you can later ask your healthcare providers.

Communicate with family and friends

It's natural for family and friends to want to know the latest status of the patient and see how you are holding up. You may want to consider:

1. Writing emails that can be sent to a specific group of people all at one time.
2. Creating a designated and confidential Facebook group that you can invite people to have access to group
3. Creating your own free CARING BRIDGE website to provide ongoing updates to friends and family.

Delegating tasks

Tasks can be delegated to someone in your family who can dedicate time and energy to communications and providing ongoing updates. This will help decrease the number of phone calls and individual email you receive and keep you from having to retell the same news or story time and time again.

Keep your faith and hope strong

Please don't hesitate to contact our Pastoral Care department for support as needed. Be encouraging while speaking to your loved one. If your loved one is not alert, always start your visit with your name. Talk to your loved one and let him/her know what is happening. Read cards that have been sent. All of these things help with recovery. Patients receive cues from you. If you are rested and seem positive, they will be positive too.

Using the communications board

A white communications board is in each room and allows for two-way communication between staff and families. This board will help families to identify individual caregivers and also enable staff members to get to know your loved one. The white board will display the name of the RN caring for the patient on the current shift and will also have a set of daily goals for the patient. You are welcome to bring in photos and familiar items to the patient's room to help keep your loved one oriented and comforted.

Identifying a care partner

It is beneficial to the patient, family and staff if you can identify a Care Partner to serve as the primary contact for communication and decisions regarding the patient. This individual will have greater access to information on the patient's progress and will partner with staff members and physicians to ensure the most effective plan of care. This person will be encouraged to contact all relatives and friends who need to be reached each day for an update on the patient's condition.

Please see our suggestions above on how to ease this burden. This will help to lessen the calls placed to staff members and will allow them to spend more time at the bedside. Please ask your nurse for more information on becoming a Care Partner.

Requesting a family meeting

Communicating with the care team is important so that you and the patient know the plan of care. If you would like to schedule a time to meet with the team, please let your nurse know so that we can facilitate a meeting.

What happens after the ICU\PCU?

The goal of the critical care team is to stabilize critically ill patients and transfer them to a medical-surgical bed within the hospital where they return to more normal routine and focus on recovery.

**Always remember that we are here for you.
Let us know how we may help you and your family
during your stay in Critical Care.**