



Letterkenny University Hospital

Intensive Care Unit

Information for patients
and relatives



Introduction

Welcome to the Intensive Care Unit.

When your relative is admitted to Intensive Care, it can be a stressful and worrying time. This booklet has been developed by ICU staff, who recognise the importance of written information to help families through this challenging journey.

The intensive care team is available to offer valuable support and advice. If you need any further information, please do not hesitate to ask any member of the nursing team.

We have two Intensive Care Unit areas: ICU A and ICU B. Patients will be placed in either unit depending on clinical need. It is the same ICU team that staff both units. We have a direct phone line to each unit:

ICU A: 074 9123775

ICU B: 074 9104443

We ask you to choose a representative to link in with the staff in ICU for updates on your relative's condition. This person can be a spokesperson and relay information to family and friends as you deem appropriate.



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When Intensive Care is needed

A patient may be in intensive care because of an accident, an illness, or for further treatment and observation after surgery. Our patients require constant monitoring and support from equipment, medication and specialist staff.

Many patients need support for organ function such as the heart, lungs and kidneys. We use specialist equipment, such as, ventilators for breathing support and dialysis machines for kidney support. Many patients have lines inserted into a vein or artery to administer medication, for continuous blood pressure monitoring and to easily take regular blood samples.

We understand that having a relative in ICU can be a very emotional and stressful time. Your relative may be connected to various machines and drips and may look very different from usual. We understand the importance of communication and your need for information about your relative. We will do our very best to update you regularly.

The length of time patients spend in ICU may vary from days to weeks depending on the severity of their illness.



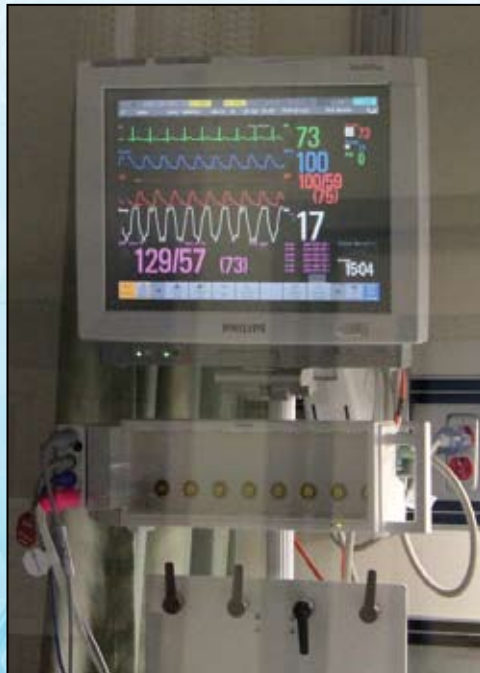
An example of a ventilator

Admission to the Intensive Care Unit

When a patient is first admitted to ICU, it may take some time for the doctors and nurses to assess and treat your relative. You will be asked to wait in the waiting room during this crucial time. We appreciate that this wait can add to feelings of anxiety, worry and frustration. However, we ask for your patience and we will do

our best to keep you informed of your relative's condition and allow you to visit as soon as possible.

On every visit to ICU you will need to ring the buzzer and a member of staff will bring you into the unit.



A monitor displaying continuous blood pressure, heart rate and vital signs

Preventing Infection in ICU

Letterkenny University Hospital is committed to reducing the spread of infections. Hand gels are located at various points throughout the hospital. This reduces the spread of infection to your relative as well as to yourself and other family members. Please use the hand gel or wash your hands before entering and on leaving the ICU.

We may ask you to wear a mask, gloves or apron when visiting depending on infection risks in the unit and to be aware that this may change on each visit. Nursing staff will assist you on arrival.

We may ask for personal information to assess infection risk, such as your name, address, contact details and if you have experienced any symptoms related to Covid-19 or other infections. This information is vital for contact tracing and is maintained under GDPR regulations 2018.

What to Expect

We ask you to choose a representative to link in with the staff in ICU for updates on your relative's condition. This person can be a spokesperson and relay information to family and friends as appropriate. This allows us to provide consistent updates. Their phone number will be kept in the patient's chart. There will be one nurse allocated to care for your relative with support from other staff. We call this one-to-one nursing.

At significant milestones or with any major changes in your relative's condition, a meeting may be arranged to discuss progress and treatment plans with immediate family. We are more than happy to answer your questions and feel free to discuss any concerns with us.

We invite you to share with us information about your relative including beliefs, cultural, spiritual and religious. This information helps us to understand their needs so we can provide the best care.

When a patient is admitted to ICU, there are occasions when they must be transferred to another hospital to provide a continuation of their care or for a specific medical procedure. The patient's next of kin will be informed prior to transfer, and an ICU nurse and doctor will accompany your relative to the admitting hospital.





Daily Routine

The Intensive Care Unit can be very busy as your relative requires specialised nursing care, medical assessments, x-rays, procedures and physiotherapy. Afternoon rest periods have proved to be beneficial for our patients. Although many patients may be sedated, a period of uninterrupted rest is very beneficial for their recovery.

Visiting Times

Visiting is an important part of the patient's day, however so is nursing/medical care and rest. Visiting times to the unit are 11.30-1pm and 5-7pm. Your visiting time must be booked in advance by contacting the ICU. The visiting policy is strictly implemented. If there are special circumstances, then you should discuss this issue with the nurse manager.

Please note: These times are subject to change dependent on the activity in the ICU and during the pandemic/ infection outbreaks. We ask that you ring the unit to discuss if a visit is possible. Your safety is also our priority.

For the safety of your loved one, we ask that only two immediate family members be at the bedside at one time. Immediate family members are spouses, parents, siblings and adult children. If younger children are visiting the unit, this can be arranged in advance so that a suitable time can be arranged where we are available to support them and their needs. We have books available to support children and to explain the ICU environment.

If you are unwell, for example, have diarrhoea, vomiting, cough or cold, please do not visit. If you are unsure, please contact the unit and a nurse will advise you.



What can I bring in for my relative?

For infection control reasons, personal belongings are limited. ICU will supply all products necessary for washing and grooming. Our patients will wear a gown for the duration of their stay in the ICU. This facilitates the various cables and lines that we need for monitoring. If applicable, please bring in your loved one's spectacles and hearing aids. You may bring in photos, cards and children's drawings if you wish. Flowers are not permitted.



How long will my relative stay in Intensive Care?

The length of your relative's stay in ICU will vary depending on their reason for admission and how they respond to treatment. Every patient's recovery differs.

Your relative will have good days but you should be prepared for setbacks. Please try not to get discouraged with this and rely on your family and friends for support. We encourage you to share your worries with nursing staff. We are here to listen and offer assistance with any questions you may have.

Keeping a diary for your relative with the daily updates can help them piece together the days in the ICU. At times a diary may be started in the ICU and the nurses will inform you of this.



After Discharge from ICU – Information for Patients and Family members

Once you/your relative's condition has improved, the doctor will decide when you can leave the ICU and go to the ward, High Dependency Unit (HDU) or Coronary Care Unit (CCU). This can be a frightening time for patients and families as you no longer have one-to-one nursing, and are still not well enough to leave the hospital. The process of re-learning many simple things will continue, including walking, eating, drinking and washing for yourself.

When you transfer to the ward, the ICU staff hand over all the details of your stay in ICU, including the plan for your ongoing treatment, your medications and your rehabilitation progress.

This can be a very worrying time as you have become accustomed to ICU care and familiar with the nurses and routine. You can also speak with you/your relative's doctor/surgeon/nursing staff if you have any questions about the ongoing treatment plan.

The nurses and physiotherapists will help your relative to get back their independence and strength as much as possible. After spending time in ICU, your body will likely feel weak. You may tire easily at the start, but your energy and strength should improve as you recover.

The visiting times on the ward can often be different to the ICU, and now that you are recovering you may have more visitors. This can also be tiring, so rest when you can. Sleep can often be disturbed after a stay in the ICU. Ear plugs and an eye mask may help with rest. Speak with family if you feel there too many visitors and your relative finds this tiring. Also speak with the nurse/doctor for further advice.



Your return home after an ICU stay

Leaving the hospital after experiencing critical illness is a major step in your recovery. It is a very positive step, but it will take time and effort for you to return to normal life. You will probably be given a plan on exercise advice and information on how to continue your physiotherapy and physical recovery.

An occupational therapist may have advised on adjustment to your home in order for the environment to be safe for you during your recovery. You may also need to use walking aids or other supports, and you may be linked in to community services for ongoing physical rehab.

Once you are home, your GP will likely be involved in your general care and recovery. They will support you in regaining your strength and discussing any ongoing concerns with you.

If your concerns are more related to ICU, make contact with the ICU and we will try and put you in touch with someone who can help.

It can take time to return to previous activities and hobbies, and can sometimes affect intimate relationships. Take your time and discuss your concerns with your partner and GP if necessary.

ICUsteps is a volunteer led group who meet to share and support ICU patients and family members in their recovery. It can be difficult and daunting to return to normal life after critical illness. It is normal to feel overwhelmed. Please see [icusteps](#). ie for further details and join a Zoom meeting where past patients discuss life after ICU and offer suggestions and support on overcoming struggles.

When things don't go well

Unfortunately sometimes even with our best efforts, your relative may not survive. We understand that this is a very traumatic time for families and please let us know if there is anything that you need.

Their death can occur very suddenly in the ICU or could be after a long stay with us. In some circumstances organ donation can be an option in the ICU. If you have any questions about this, it is best to speak with the nurse at the bedside, the nurse manager on duty or the consultant. We will speak with you if this is a potential pathway for your relative. Any questions you have can be answered. We appreciate that this is a difficult time, and difficult questions may arise. We will help you as best we can.

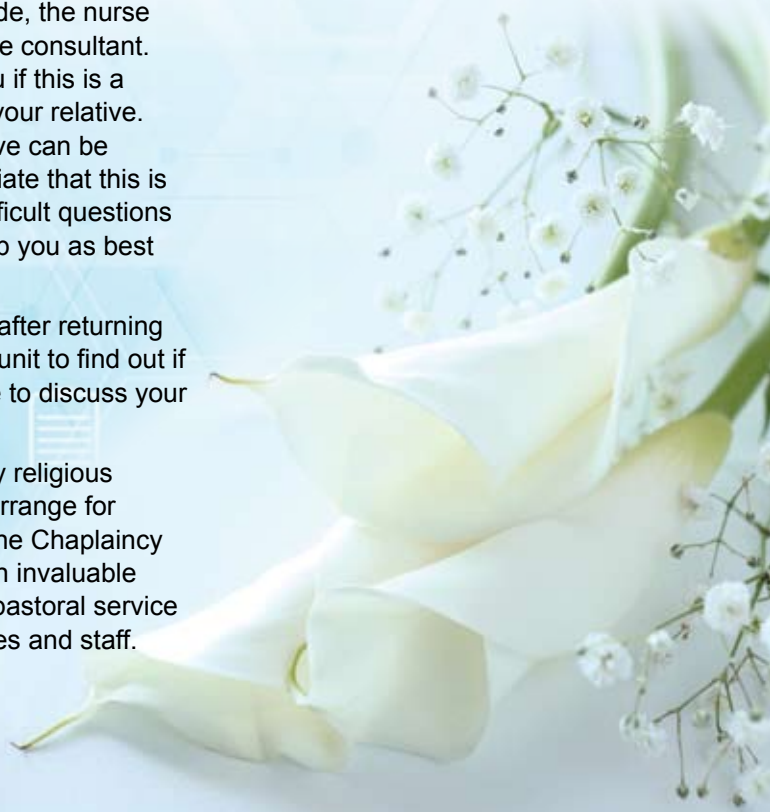
If you have questions after returning home, please call the unit to find out if we can arrange a time to discuss your questions with you.

If your relative has any religious preferences, we can arrange for prayers at this time. The Chaplaincy Department provide an invaluable multi-denominational pastoral service to our patients, relatives and staff.

Chapel and Pastoral Care

The hospital's chapel is located on floor B, at the end of the long glass corridor. Pastoral care and support are available to patients and their relatives regardless of their religious beliefs. If you need the Chaplain, please let the nurse at the bedside know.

If you are interested in attending Catholic Mass in the hospital, the times will be displayed at the Chapel, or speak with the bedside nurse and we will find out the times for you.



Uniforms for Staff in the ICU

CNM 2 and CNM1	Navy blue scrubs
Staff Nurse	Royal blue scrubs
Health care assistants	Green scrubs
Anaesthetists	Royal blue scrubs
Medical/Surgical Doctors	No uniform
Physiotherapists	White polo shirt with blue stripe
Dieticians and Speech Therapists	White tunic with black stripe
Clinical Nurse Specialists	Red tunic

During times of infection outbreaks, such as Covid, you will likely see all staff wearing scrubs that are laundered by the hospital. It can be hard to identify staff members during this time. We will endeavour to wear our name badges and introduce ourselves to you with every interaction. We know this can be confusing.

Facilities in the Hospital

- There is a small **waiting room** for ICU relatives, equipped with a kettle, tea, coffee and fridge. We ask that you do not leave valuables unattended.
- **Toilets** are situated on Floor D, beside surgical 2 ward.
- The hospital canteen, “**Junction Restaurant**”, is located on Floor B. Opening hours: 8.30am to 5.30pm, seven days. They accept cash and card.
- The **Oasis shop** on floor A, beside the reception, provides a range of snacks, newspapers, hot and cold drinks. They also accept cash and card. Opening times are as follows:
Mon-Fri: 7.30am - 8pm
Sat: 9am - 8pm
Sun: 10am - 8pm
- There is a **vending machine** on Floor B beside the restaurant (snacks and cold drinks).
- **Enquiries**
For enquiries to ICU A ring 074 9123775, this is a direct line to ICU A.
For enquiries to ICU B ring 074 9104443, this is a direct line to ICU B.
- Telephone numbers of hotels, and bed and breakfasts are available from reception or the Tourist Information Office.
- Euro car parks deal with parking on hospital grounds, if you have any queries, their office number is: 074 9188813.

Useful supports & contacts

ICU Recovery

www.icusteps.ie
www.icusteps.org

ICU Delirium

www.icudelirium.org

Asthma Ireland	www.asthma.ie	1800 44 54 64
Bereavement	www.cancer.ie www.aware.ie www.hospicefoundation.ie www.childhoodbereavement.ie	01 6793188
Carers	www.familycarers.ie	1800 240724
Citizens Information	www.citizensinformation.ie	076 1074000
Diabetes	www.diabetes.ie	01 842 81 18
Head Injuries	www.headway.ie 1800 400478	www.abiireland.ie 01 280 41 64
Irish Heart Foundation	www.irishheart.ie	1800 252550
Meningitis	www.meningitisnow.org	0800 8010 388
Pieta House	www.pieta.ie	1800 247 247
Samaritans	www.samaritans.org	116 123 (free)
Spinal Injuries	www.spinalinjuries.ie	01 653 21 80
Stomas	www.isccna.org/stoma-support-groups-links www.coloplast.ie	1800 40 95 02
Stroke	www.headway.ie 1800 400 478	www.irishheart.ie 1800 25 25 50
Sepsis	www.sepsistrust.org www.rorystauntonfoundationforsepsis.org	



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www.hse.ie/luh

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