

If your relative /whanau has been a patient in our Intensive Care Unit (ICU) for a few days you may be asked if you would like to start an ICU patient diary for them. The diaries are offered to the families of our longer stay patients. They can then start to write down and record their relatives/whanau's time and experiences in ICU.

Keeping ICU diaries started in Sweden. It was recognised that patients who recover from a critical illness often have little or no memories of their time in the ICU. This 'memory gap' is common in patients who have been asleep (sedated) for long periods of time and who have 'lost' several weeks or months.

We introduced patient diaries to Wellington ICU in August 2009. Since then we have given out over 570 diaries for families to record their experiences of ICU. You do not have to keep a diary. It is only kept when family or patient consent has been obtained. This would include the taking of any photographs.

The diary would stay at the patient's bed side. Visitors are able to write comments if they wish to. The diary is a way of recording who has visited. This is a good record when your relative / whanau is sedated and perhaps unaware of who is visiting. ICU staff can also write in the diary. This records which gives situation around the patient's condition and can give more information on their progress.

What are the benefits of keeping a diary?

- It gives the patient a written record that has been kept by their friends and family. The diary can include photographs and stories. This can

help the patient to piece together the time they spent in ICU

- Family members can find it useful to read what others have written. This may help them keep up-to-date with their friend /relatives condition Photographs showing the patient with their family & friends around them may also reassure them that they were not alone during this very difficult time. We have a digital camera in ICU that can be used to take and print photos for putting in the diary. You do not have to take photographs, and any photographs will be shown to a family member before being added to the diary

What will happen to the diary?

The diaries are considered to be the property of the patient and are given to them on their discharge from ICU. If the patient or family do not wish to keep the diary we will dispose of the diary in a confidential manner.

Some of the feedback received from patients/families about Patient Diaries:

"It took Pt A about three months to be able to read the diary. This was very emotional for him, as he had no collection of most of the time in ICU. He asked many questions and the diary was a great back up as to the time frame and medical procedures."

"The diary was a wonderful tool, not only for Pt B, but for the whole family."

"I have no recall of being in ICU even though I have photos of me with my eyes open."

"I think if staff had written in it I would have had a better record of the treatment I received."

[continued]

“Please don’t stop offering this service.”

“Yes the nurses wrote in it, it was great to have their input.....we would read the nurses comments to find out what went on while we were out.”

“More photos to be taken to the show progress that I had made.”

“A great idea, however it would be better to start the diary earlier in my husband’s stay in ICU”.