



A guide to...

Intensive Care Unit

Information for relatives and carers

How to contact us

Intensive Care Unit

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If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 187** or email westherts.pals@nhs.net



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About us

The Intensive Care Unit at Watford General Hospital is a 20-bedded unit which cares for “intensive care patients” and “high dependency patients”.

A patient whose condition is extremely serious, possibly life-threatening, is often taken to an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) which provides constant observation and treatment from trained staff qualified to use specialised equipment. The nurse-to-patient ratio is either 1:1 or 1:2.

A High Dependency Unit is for patients who require less monitoring or treatment than is normally provided in an ICU, but still need more care than can be offered on a general ward.

We are a multidisciplinary team consisting of doctors, nurses, health care assistants, physiotherapists, pharmacists, dietitians and occupational therapists. We also liaise with specialty teams from other hospitals if their advice is required. The consultants work on a weekly rotation but a thorough handover of all the patients is done to ensure continuity of care.

Please feel free to ask us any questions at any time. We also have ward clerks who support our team and will be able to provide you with assistance.

A day in Intensive Care

The day is planned as much as possible around the individual needs of your relative or friend. We have a basic structure to the day, but things can change according to the patient’s needs.

7:30am: Nursing staff and the team of doctors receive handover from the night staff.

The consultants aim to start their ward round promptly after this as it can take some time. If you are visiting whilst the ward round is in progress, you will be asked to step out into the waiting room to protect patient confidentiality.

The consultant will review each patient and make a plan for the day. This may include physiotherapy, input from other members of the multidisciplinary team, or further tests and investigations which may be in different department.

Throughout the day, the nurse looking after your loved one will need to provide personal care and change their position. You will be asked to step out and wait in the waiting room during this time.

Mealtimes are not strict, lunch is between 12 noon and 1pm, and dinner is between 5-6pm.

5pm to 6pm: Evening rounds to review all our patients.

7:30pm: The night shift staff take over from the staff on the day shift.

Visiting times are 10am to 7pm. No more than two visitors are allowed at one time.

We appreciate you want to be with your loved one as much as possible when visiting but there will be times you are asked to step out for a short time so that we can provide care. The needs of patients are our utmost priority.

We will call you back if we have any concerns about your loved one.

What you may see in ICU

The Intensive Care Unit uses machines which can look frightening when seen for the first time. These machines help us to monitor and support a patient's normal body functions.

Many of the machines have alarms and flashing lights which go off quite often for a variety of reasons. Please do not be frightened by the lights or noises. The alarms are to attract the attention of the staff.



Picture of an ICU bedside monitor 1

A cardiac monitor is attached to each patient. The machine picks up electrical impulses from a patient's heart and can detect any abnormalities. The monitor also shows a patient's blood pressure and temperature. It is normal for the numbers on the monitor to keep changing.

Patients who are not strong enough to breathe on their own will be connected to a ventilator (breathing machine). This is attached to a tube which passes through the mouth into the windpipe. The patient will be sedated during this time.

You will see us administering many different medications to the patient. In Intensive Care we often give drugs that help improve the patient's blood pressure and sedation to keep them asleep.

If the patient is awake and able to eat and drink, they can order meals from the menu. If the patient is sedated or unable to eat themselves, we can still provide liquid food, which contains essential nutrients, and this is given either through the nose via a tube which goes down into the stomach or by through a drip.

How you can help

Studies show that sleep in the Intensive Care Unit is poor due to frequent disturbances from medical interventions or noise. Patients may want to sleep during the day to make up for this. Illness and sleep deprivation can cause the patient to become delirious, so we encourage the patients to rest as much as they need.

Some of the drugs will keep a patient deeply asleep. However, feel free to talk to your relative or friend. Do not be afraid to touch them, it may be comforting for both of you. Some relatives like to read to them, play them their favourite music or bring in photos from home to have by the patient's bedside.

Support for you

You can help the patient by taking care of yourself. You can come and go throughout the visiting times should you need a break. The patient will be very well cared for and the staff will contact you straight away if they need to or if there is any change in the patient's condition.

You may not feel like eating and you may have difficulty sleeping but take time to eat regularly and rest when you can.

Care for carers

If you are the patient's carer, we can contact the Care for Carer's team who will also be able to offer some support.

Emotional support

The hospital's Pastoral Care team are always available to provide you with religious or emotional support should you need it. The nursing staff are more than happy to organise this for you.

ICU Steps

[ICU steps](#) is a website that provides information for the relatives and friends of patients who are in ICU.

Parking

You may be eligible for help with parking costs, please speak to us about this. The multi-storey car park and the Parking Hub on level 0 are open 24/7.

If you have concerns

If you have any concerns or if there is anything you don't understand or want to know more about, please discuss this with the nurse caring for your loved one or the nurse in charge.

If you're unhappy with the care being given to the patient and you are not able to resolve with this with the ICU staff, you can contact the hospital Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who will help you to find the answers you need. The PALS office is located in the main reception and is open 8am to 4pm. Or telephone them on 01923 217 187.