

Caring for patients with Coronavirus in hospital

'It will help all of us if we are able to speak
honestly to each other'



One + all | we care

Some of us will have family members who are admitted to hospital with a Coronavirus infection.

The exceptional circumstances that we face will likely result in families being separated at this time. This leaflet has been written in response to this very difficult situation.

How we will care for your family member:

Throughout this booklet, when we refer to families, we mean all those close to the patient, whatever their relationship.

If you have been given this leaflet it is likely that your family member has been admitted to a hospital, either for treatment or very sadly for end of life care. We recognise that these are desperately difficult times for families, and that being separated suddenly from those we love, nurture and depend upon at this time, may cause significant distress and suffering during what is already a frightening and anxious time.

This leaflet was written to try and give families an understanding of how we, the doctors, nurses and many, many other staff at the hospitals in Cornwall will care for your loved one over the next hours, days and weeks. We hope that this will provide you with some small comfort during these extraordinary times, when you are not able to be by your loved one's side.

Our aim, despite stretched resources, will be to try and deliver the right care for people, whatever their circumstances.

Caring actively for people:

It may be that your family member has been admitted to hospital with the aim of treating the Coronavirus infection. The team delivering their care will be focusing on managing the virus and any infections that they identify using treatments like antibiotic medicines, oxygen therapy, fluids into the vein and any other interventions that will support them to recover from the virus. Throughout this time the team overseeing the care of your family member will be monitoring them carefully. This will involve taking their pulse, blood pressure and temperature, taking blood tests, monitoring their oxygen levels and respirations.

We will also be thinking about the comfort of your family member, ensuring that we are delivering good quality nursing care. This will include care for personal hygiene and symptom control, but also being mindful of the need to provide emotional support at a time when patients themselves may be missing the support of those close to them.

We hope that we will support as many people as possible in their recovery from the Coronavirus, helping them to return to their families and communities.

If your family member becomes increasingly unwell:

As we know, many people recover well from the Coronavirus. Some people who may recover need very intensive care in order to give them that opportunity – we often call this ‘escalating treatment’.

For patients who need intensive treatment, this is usually delivered in a Critical Care unit. The staff in these units are highly skilled in the technical care that very sick patients need. In this situation staff will attend to your family member’s medical treatment and comfort.

Throughout they will continue to monitor your family member very carefully, looking to see if they are getting better, and may return to a ward area and continue their recovery, or if they are continuing to deteriorate to the point where such intensive, and sometimes intrusive care is not proving beneficial.

Regrettably some patients will become so very unwell that we believe intensive treatment such as mechanical ventilation will not provide any benefit.

Caring for yourself during this time:

If you aren't able to visit someone in their last weeks or days of life, you may find this very upsetting and challenging. It's a very difficult situation to be in. Try to remember that this is not your fault. It may be the best way to reduce the risk of other people getting Coronavirus, or getting it yourself.

Sometimes a way to feel better about situations is to feel more prepared for them. There are some ideas throughout this leaflet. You will have some of your own such as making sure you eat healthily, sleep as best as you can, getting some fresh air, speaking with loved ones and keeping hydrated.

As you are not able to be together during this time of most need, it might be useful to think about a particular object or perhaps a smell that conjures up nice memories, a photograph or anything specific to you both that might bring a sense of comfort at this challenging time. This can then be brought into hospital at admission, perhaps in the same way that a child might take a comforter with them to nursery to remind them of home. When apart, this might help you feel more comforted that your loved one is not alone.

It might be helpful to find out more about the care they are getting, so that you can feel more reassured they are getting the care they need. The hospital team may need consent from your family member to discuss some details with you so you might want to ensure you have discussed this with each other and it is documented before admission so this is less distressing for you later.

Hopefully it may be possible to phone the person – you may be able to talk to them or read to them. You can also try to video call them.

Even if your loved one isn't able to communicate, they may still be able to hear your voice on the phone. You could also send a message, letter, gift or a card. They could also do this.

You may have lots of different feelings about not being able to see them. It might help to talk to someone about this, like a family member or friend. Sometimes you might also wish to speak to someone who is a professional. There is lots of support available – some of the numbers are provided later in this leaflet.

We hope that many people recover and return home. Nevertheless we recognise that families will be very worried that their loved one may deteriorate further.

End of life care

Some people will be so very unwell when they arrive at the hospital, that we immediately recognise that they are likely to die. Other patients may continue to deteriorate despite the care that we give them.

We have worked very hard in Cornwall in recent years to improve the care that we deliver for patients at the end of their life, making it the best that it can be. We have committed ward staff, who are supported by an experienced specialist palliative and end of life care team.

We have a plan of care specifically for patients at the end of their life, and this guides staff to focus on what matters to each individual patient at that time. All staff caring closely for patients with Coronavirus will be wearing protective clothing, nevertheless we will do our absolute best to ensure that we communicate with patients clearly, kindly, and with compassion and respect.

We will support patients to eat and drink for as long as they are able, and make sure that we attend to their personal care when they are not able.

We have safe and effective medicine plans, especially drawn up by our specialist palliative care doctors to address the symptoms our patients with Coronavirus may experience. Our aim will be to give the smallest amount of medication that we are able to relieve symptoms. We also have special charts that will help guide staff in ensuring that symptom control and comfort is our priority.

And because we know that families will want to speak to or see each other at this time, we have made plans for patients to access mobile phones and tablets, to communicate with their loved ones at this time.

Above all, we want you to know, that in your absence we will work together to deliver the best care we can for your loved one.

We want you to help us, by making sure we know who we need to communicate with.

For patients who die in our care:

For any patients with Coronavirus that may die in our care, we will do our utmost to ensure that death is as free from discomfort and as dignified as we can make it. The medicines used at the end of life, not only relieve physical symptoms, but can relieve emotional distress and suffering.

For patients that have become so very sick with the Coronavirus that it has brought about the end of their life, and they have died, we will not attempt to revive or resuscitate them at this time, enabling death to be as peaceful and gentle as possible.

In order to work closely with families, our doctors may talk to you about plans for care at this time.

Following death:

After someone dies a member of the team who has been caring for them (usually a doctor or a nurse) will ring you to tell you sensitively what has happened. At this time they will give you some simple information and advice about what will happen next.

Important contact information that may help you:

For emotional support ring the Cornwall Coronavirus Bereavement Helpline:

01726 829874, hours 10:00 am – 6:00pm.

This telephone number provides a single point of contact for those who have a loved one in the hospital, or those who have been bereaved for any reason during the Coronavirus outbreak.

Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust bereavement office:

Telephone 01872 252713- for information and advice.

For information on all of the services offering support visit:

www.cornwallbereavementnetwork.org

Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust:

If you would like to send your family member a message our patient ambassadors will be happy to help. The team can deliver letters or simple well wishes helping you to stay connected at the most difficult of times.

Email rcht.covidstayconnected@nhs.net, or leave us a message and we will return your call: 01872 253793.

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If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690



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