



## Recovery and wellness post ICU: using patient diaries

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### Project background

The intensive care unit is situated in the Ulster Hospital in Dundonald, Belfast. It is the major acute hospital for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and delivers a full range of acute services for the population. Staff had noticed that ICU patients and their relatives attending the follow-up clinic were describing concerning issues, including nightmares, sleep deprivation, hallucinations and flashbacks. These contributed to their difficulties in adjusting to being at home and leading a regular family life, creating stress for the patient and their family. Staff thought a possible solution was the introduction of patient diaries, which could build on the work of the follow-up clinic and further improve psychological support. Intensive care patient diaries are a simple but valuable tool to help patients come to terms with their critical illness experience. Developed extensively in the early 1990s in Scandinavia, the success of these journals in piecing together the fragmented memories of a stay in ICU and enhancing psychological recovery has been well documented.

### Aims and objectives

The aim of the project was to develop a tool to record a critically ill patient's stay in ICU that can be used by the patient and their family to aid psychological recovery. To achieve this aim, the objectives identified were to:

- Engage with key stakeholders
- Gather information, including patient and carer experiences, to guide the development and implementation of the diary
- Launch the use of the diary and evaluate its effectiveness

### Implications for practice

- Taking time out of practice to work with key stakeholders to establish a vision and take actions forward can maintain momentum in a project or service improvement initiative
- Persistence and resources from outside the unit may be required when seeking consent to gather patient/carer stories from those who are critically ill
- Taking time to engage the wider team via lunch and supper sessions to introduce them to patient diaries is time well invested in advance of the launch date
- Gathering feedback on the use of the dairies at the follow-up clinic can be a useful evaluation method

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### Online

Further information about the project can be accessed from: [fons.org/library/report-details?nstdid=71927](https://fons.org/library/report-details?nstdid=71927)

### Key activities and outcomes

#### • Communication within the practice development group

The already established practice development group, made up of nursing staff, administration staff and allied healthcare professionals, held monthly lunchtime meeting that were initially used to outline and develop the project. Communication was also maintained via email, texts and the use of a noticeboard in the ICU staff room.

#### • Staff engagement workshop

The members of the practice development group decided to hold a workshop at the end of April 2015 to involve more stakeholders in the project. A total of 14 participants attended, with representation from all professional groups. The workshop was facilitated by the project leaders and the FoNS facilitator and a values clarification exercise was undertaken, a patient story shared and a claims, concerns and issues exercise used to establish an action plan for the project. Subsequent monthly meetings took place to discuss implementation as well as the practicalities involved.

#### • Patient/relative story

The project leaders wanted to capture the patient and carer experiences but were aware of the vulnerabilities that critical illness involves. After advice from the 10,000 voices project, which allows patients, their relatives and carers an opportunity to share their experiences of healthcare, a carer story of writing a diary for their critically ill loved one was captured. This was shared with the stakeholders and led to a change in direction from the nursing staff being the contributors to the diaries, to carers and family members being offered the opportunity.

#### • Implementation and launch

To facilitate the implementation of the diaries a series of 45-minute lunch and supper sessions were held over two weeks for all the staff on the ICU. A 'patient diary box' was developed by the practice development team, which included a flowchart to guide staff, a patient information leaflet, an 'About Me' template and items such as notebooks and pens. During the launch week the group members were available to support and encourage the nursing staff to approach relatives of patients about the creation of the diaries and their purpose.

#### • Patient diary feedback

Although a formal evaluation of the patient diaries has not been undertaken, feedback has been provided by patients and their families who attend the follow-up clinic. They have discussed the benefits of the diary and have also included comments on how to improve the diaries for the future. One patient, who felt the diary had improved his recovery, commented:

*'I found reading the diary after my discharge – I did wait quite some time before I started into it, I'm not sure why, maybe fear of knowing the anxiety my condition had caused everyone – I found it very emotional and it certainly brought a lump to my throat and made me blink a lot. I am certainly glad that the record was kept; it has given me a glimpse into what had happened during my illness, how ill I had been and how everyone had coped.'*