

PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE OF COVID-19 CRITICAL CARE PATIENTS: STAFF GUIDE 2/1

When people suffer a frightening experience such as admission to critical care with Covid-19, they have 5 main needs: **Safety**, **Calm**, **Connectedness**, **Confidence** and **Hope**. The following tips may help you deliver these 5 principles of Psychological First Aid.

1. Safety

All critical care patients need to hear messages of safety – whether they are on CPAP or other NIV; about to be ventilated; are already ventilated and sedated; have a tracheostomy; after extubation/decannulation. Tell them

- you are a nurse (etc) and wearing mask, gown and visor to prevent infection
- they have been ill, but they are in a safe place
- this is a hospital, the people around them are doctors and nurses
- acknowledge that they may feel upset or frightened.
- if patients are delirious or agitated, speak in a gentle, soothing voice; use open body language; do not crowd them; move slowly; use short sentences, speak to them little and often; do not either argue or agree with them about strange beliefs they may express; just emphasise your aim is to keep them comfortable and safe

2. Calm

Information, distraction and relaxation can help lower anxiety

- give clear, simple information about illness and treatment (see patient information sheet) and reassuring news about their family where possible. Continue to repeat key information as they may not retain it
- hold their hand, ask them about themselves, talk to them calmly about what they see around them, offer small gestures such as combing hair, play music
- teach slow breathing/relaxation/calm place exercises. Use relaxation Apps

3. Connectedness

You are very busy, but it makes a real difference to patients and their recovery if you

- find time to talk to them
- find ways to help them communicate
- help them to use a phone to text or FaceTime family/friends
- offer and help to organise a family video call
- ask if they have any messages for loved ones before being ventilated

4. Confidence/control

As soon as possible, give patients a sense of control and confidence that they can start to look after themselves

- start by finding small ways they can do some self-care, such as having a wash/eating/brushing teeth/rehab routine
- help them to find out any information they want to know
- help them communicate about their feelings and worries

5. Hope

Encourage hope and realistic optimism wherever possible

- Point out any signs of progress, patients often don't notice these
- Find out what is important to them and help them achieve steps towards them, such as get off ventilator, sit up, eat and drink, get out of bed, walk to the toilet, leave critical care, go home