

Introduction

The taking of patient photographs is carried out purely for the benefit of the patient. When patients have a gap in their memory due to being sedated for a period of time, a photograph can provide evidence of what was happening to them and reassures them that they were being cared for.

Patients often do not understand how ill they have been because they have little or no memory of events and yet they have woken up with a body that looks and feels very different to how they remember themselves (eg they may have lost a lot of weight, or have scars and feel very debilitated). A photograph can help them understand why their recovery may be taking much longer than they expected.

Patients are often comforted by the inclusion of family members or perhaps nursing staff in their photo, as this provides tangible evidence that they had not been left alone.

Consent

If the patient is unable to consent to being photographed for themselves, we would ask for a relative's verbal consent. This is because we want you to feel comfortable with what we are doing. You are not consenting to the printing or viewing of any photos, in fact you will not see them yourself, unless the patient chooses to show you, once they are well enough to give their consent for printing.

Procedure for taking and storing photographs

Photos will be taken on a digital camera and immediately downloaded into a special file on our computer that has restricted access, then deleted from the camera. They are stored by hospital number only to maintain confidentiality. We request that you refrain from taking your own photographs, because the patient is usually unable to give their consent.

Viewing the photographs

When the patient feels ready to see the photo, he or she can give consent for prints, which will be given to the patient only. If the patient does not wish to see them, they will be transferred into a different storage file with very limited access where they will be kept for eight years after the last hospital episode. The patient can thus request to view the photos at a later date.

We will not ask the patient if he or she would like to see the photos whilst they are in the Critical Care Department as they are not usually ready to see them. If they have a long stay on a general ward, it may be more appropriate to view the photos then, but otherwise we recommend the patient attends the Critical care outpatient follow-up clinic. Patients only receive an invitation to the follow-up clinic if they have been in Critical Care for an extended stay.

If you would like to gain access to photos or make an appointment at the follow-up clinic to discuss any issues regarding the taking and storage of photos, please contact the Critical Care Follow-up nurse on 01206 742687, (internal extension 2687) and leave a message for a return call.

Taking and storing patient photographs in Critical Care

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Colchester General Hospital
Turner Road
Colchester
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Information for relatives and patients

Please ask if you require this leaflet in an alternative format.

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