

A Guide for Patients and Families

## Guide for Patients on Ventilatory Support at Intensive Care Unit (ICU)

### **What is a ventilator?**

This is a machine that helps a patient to breathe (mechanical ventilation). Patients are usually placed on ventilator due to underlying medical conditions which affects the ability to protect their own airway and breathe on their own. The ventilator temporarily takes over the work of breathing during this time.

### **What to expect when your loved ones are on ventilatory support?**

The ventilator is connected to an endotracheal breathing tube that is placed in the patient's mouth and passes into the windpipe. This tube delivers oxygenated air directly to the lungs and aids in gas exchange, such as the removal of carbon dioxide.



The ventilator is set to control each breath. This may be uncomfortable for some patients as they struggle to coordinate their breathing with the machine. As the breathing tube is in the mouth, patients will not be able to talk or eat orally and therefore it can be a cause of discomfort, pain, and anxiety.

Analgesia and sedation may be given to keep them comfortable. These medications may cause them to be drowsy and disorientated. Patients will be monitored closely, and medications will be managed and titrated by the ICU team.



## Communication

- Talk to them as you would normally do.
- Communicate to your loved ones by holding their hand so that they feel your presence.
- Be careful of the invasive tubes and lines surrounding the patient. Do consult the ICU nurses before touching the patient.

## Ventilator alarms

- Stay calm, do not panic.
- Alarms are to alert the nurses to check on the patient.
- While an alarm may warrant immediate medical attention, an alarm can also be easily triggered by cough, attempt to talk, or biting of the breathing tube.
- Do not adjust the switches and alarms of the equipment as this may affect the safety of the patient.



## Restraints

For patient's safety, restrainers may be applied to prevent them from pulling out the breathing tube. It will be removed once they become rationale and compliant to the treatment plan.

Rest assured that your loved ones are being closely monitored and are well taken care of by a team of trained physicians and nurses.

Please consult the doctors or nurses for more information.