

## Why is communication difficult?

The relative/friend you are visiting may not be able to speak at the moment. This may be because:

- They find it difficult to stay alert.
- They are getting tired quickly.
- They are distracted by pain or discomfort
- They are confused as a result of their medical condition.
- They are finding it hard to see you clearly, or to hear what you are saying either because of their medical condition or because of the medication they have been given.
- The equipment that helps with their breathing is making it hard for them to use their voice, for example, a tracheostomy tube.

## What does a tracheostomy tube look like?



A tracheostomy tube is a small plastic tube which is inserted into the windpipe below the Adam's Apple or voice box. Once it is in the windpipe the small balloon near the end is filled with air.

## What is the purpose of a tracheostomy tube?

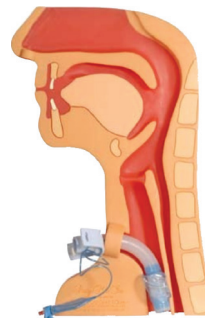
It is there to help the person to breathe. Air passes from the breathing machine, (ventilator), through the tracheostomy tube and into the lungs, and then back again. The air will flow in and out of the tube into the lungs instead of in and out of the



person's mouth and nose. This means they will not be able to speak as there is no air going through the voice box and out through the mouth.

When the person recovers they are able to breathe by themselves again and do not need the help of the breathing machine.

Around this time the small balloon near the bottom of the tracheostomy tube is deflated so that air can flow from the lungs back up through the throat and out of the mouth. This means that the person can start to speak although their voice may sound a bit weaker than usual.



## What does the speech and language therapist do?

- The speech and language therapist will come and visit the patient and find out how best to help the person communicate.
- The speech and language therapist may suggest a spelling chart, picture chart or a simple touch button electronic communication aid.
- If your relative/friend has a tracheostomy tube but is able to breathe by themselves, the speech and language therapist may recommend a speaking valve to help with talking.



## How can you help with communication during this time.

- Bring in the patients' glasses or hearing aids if worn and inform the nursing staff.
- If your relative/friend does not speak English please let the nurses know which language the person speaks.
- When visiting take it in turns to speak so that only one person speaks at a time.
- The nurses will try and keep the unit as quiet as possible so that you do not have to talk against background noise.
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Tell you relative/friend the day, date and time, as it is easy for them to become disorientated.
- Keep good eye contact to hold their attention.
- Encourage them to mouth words slowly and clearly.
- Ask questions they can respond to with a 'yes' or 'no'.
- Find consistent ways for them to say 'yes/no', for example, nod or shake head; thumbs up or down or eye blink. Let the nurse know which method you are using.
- Your relative/friend may be able to write so bring in paper and pen. A clipboard or spiral notepad may be helpful. Tell the nursing staff if you are going to do this so that they can help if needed.



- If they are unable to write and you cannot understand when they mouth words, ask the speech and language therapist for help. The nurse will contact the speech and language therapist on your behalf.
- From time to time you may need to check that you have understood the person correctly by repeating back what they have just said.

## Who can I contact with queries and concerns?

### Speech and Language Therapy Team

Enquiries can be made to the Speech and Language Therapy Team on telephone **01342 414471**. Alternatively you can ask a nurse to contact us on your behalf.

### Interpreting Service

If you have an appointment and would like an interpreter please contact The Patient Advice and Liaison Service, (PALS), on **01342 414000 ext 4788**.

This is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you.

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If you'd like to find out how you can support QVH, please visit [www.supportqvh.org](http://www.supportqvh.org)



## How to help communication in the Intensive Care setting

Information for relatives and carers

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Please ask if you would like this leaflet in larger print or a different format.

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