ICU DEVICES AND PROCEDURES

In the ICU, many machines, devices, and procedures are used which are relatively uncommon in other parts of the hospital. Each device has a particular job or purpose. There are reasons (indications) to use each device or procedure for assessment or treatment. Most have some risk (possible complications) as well as potential benefit about which you should be informed (see section on General Information and Expectations). We have developed information sheets that describe the indications (reasons for), risks and benefits of a number of commonly used devices and procedures. These information sheets are not a substitute for discussions with the doctor. They serve as an educational aid.

As you read, you may get worried about the number of complications that can occur. Moreover, not all complications may be included in this list. For each procedure, we've chosen the more frequent complications. We must emphasize that most of the risks are low. Your doctor can inform you about these risks and any reasons the risks may be expected to be higher in your situation. Many complications can be treated if they occur and your doctor can describe this as well. Your doctors would not suggest a procedure or device if they did not believe that the benefits outweighed the risks. Nonetheless, it is important that patients and/or their families be informed of both benefits and risks.

There are some devices that are commonly used in the ICU that your doctor does not need to get permission to use because they carry minimal or no risk. These include continuous measurement of the heartbeat by small pads placed on the chest (called an ECG or electrocardiogram) and measurement of oxygen in the bloodstream using a light probe on the fingertip (called pulse oximetry). These and other relatively low-risk parts of your treatment, including placement of catheters into the small veins of the body, blood draws and administration of medicines, are included under the consent form you sign when you come into the hospital.

(For hospitals that download these information sheets for institutional use in the informed consent process, we suggest including this page with each information sheet to assure that patients and/or families understand the general purpose of these documents.)

Information contained on this page is for educational purposes only. Information may be obsolete or modified; contact your healthcare provider if there are any questions.