

PRESS RELEASE

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Survivorship project launched to transform long term care for ICU patients

Guy's and St Thomas' has launched an innovation project that could transform long term care support and improve recovery for patients who have required life-saving intensive care treatment.

The ICU Survivorship project has been developed to improve how patients are informed, supported and rehabilitated as they transition from the intensive care unit (ICU), to the ward and to their home. It combines a specially developed pathway delivered via a digital platform for patients and care teams, with access to a specialised occupational therapist who takes on the role of ICU recovery coordinator.

The project aims to build a greater understanding of the recovery from critical illness, including COVID-19, has been made possible thanks to donations to Guy's & St Thomas' Charity.

Central to the project is the secure digital platform aTouchAway, which has previously been used by the [Life Lines project](#) to allow families of patients in ICU to virtually visit their loved ones. The app has additional functions which are utilised throughout this project, including educational resources for family members to prepare them for when the patient returns home, and delivering the patient's individual rehabilitation programme digitally.

Kate Brooks is the Trust's first ICU recovery coordinator who supports patients using the digital recovery pathway through their ongoing care, both in hospital and the community. As well as meeting them while still in hospital to set up the individualised recovery programme, she communicates with patients and their

families using the digital platform and sets recovery goals, which enables patients to track their progress.

Kate said: “Patients often experience a number of different challenges after their stay on ICU and for many, understanding their ICU experience can be difficult.

“Visually patients might look like they are ok, but we know that spending time on ICU can have an impact on physical, cognitive and psychological health. My role involves assessing and managing the needs of the individual patient by providing specialist input or supporting with onward referrals and appointments.

“Through the digital platform, I can provide patients with the tools they need to regain their independence and return to their everyday life”.

Paul Heasman, from Swanley in Kent, suffered multiple cardiac arrests in May 2021 and was in St Thomas’ Hospital for seven weeks, including four weeks on ICU in an induced coma. For Paul, being part of the ICU Survivorship project has been invaluable to his recovery.

Paul said: “When I woke up, it was such a huge shock to find four weeks of my life had just disappeared. I was incredibly confused and overwhelmed. I started being visited by Kate not long after I woke up. She spent time with me to explain what had happened and help me to make sense of everything.

“When it was time for me to be discharged, I found the idea extremely daunting. I’ve not experienced this level of anxiety and confusion before. Using the digital platform on my phone meant I could be in contact with Kate and she would guide me through my recovery.”

The 58-year-old added: “One of the most important things to me has been jointly setting goals with Kate. At first I couldn’t even brush my teeth by myself, so this became a goal. We still do medium and long term goal setting now, and it was and still is incredibly invaluable to stay focussed and positive.

“It has been a comfort to know that someone is there to help with my recovery. Over time Kate has built up my history using the app and has used it to reassure me when I think I’m not progressing fast enough. She’s going through the journey with me and understands physically and mentally what I’ve been going through and how best to help me.”

So far 30 patients have been enrolled on to the pathway, which is offered to those who have been on a ventilator for more than three days.

The ICU Survivorship project is led by Professor Louise Rose, Professor of Critical Care Nursing at King’s College London, Professor Nick Hart, Clinical Director of Respiratory, Sleep and Critical Care at Guy’s and St Thomas’, and Dr Joel Meyer, Consultant in Critical Care at Guy’s and St Thomas’.

Professor Louise Rose said: “We are harnessing the opportunity presented to us by COVID-19 into an important innovation that has been needed for some time. The project is supporting ICU survivors and family members to get through the physical, emotional and cognitive challenges of recovering from critical illness.

“Our ICU Survivorship innovation project is creating a digitally enhanced, patient and family focussed pathway which will improve health outcomes for patients now and for years to come.”

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Notes to editors:

1. Contact: Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust tel: 020 7188 5577 or e-mail: press@gstt.nhs.uk. Out of hours, please call our pager bureau on 0844 822 2888, ask for pager number 847704 and give the pager operator your message.
2. Guy’s and St Thomas’ provides 2.9 million patient contacts in acute and specialist hospital services and community services every year. The Trust includes Guy’s Hospital, St Thomas’ Hospital, Evelina London Children’s Hospital, Royal Brompton Hospital, Harefield Hospital, and adult and children’s community services in Lambeth and Southwark
3. As one of the biggest NHS trusts in the UK, with an annual turnover of £2.1 billion, we employ around 22,000 staff. www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk

4. Guy's and St Thomas' is part of King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre (AHSC), a collaboration between King's College London, and Guy's and St Thomas', King's College Hospital and South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trusts.
www.kingshealthpartners.org