

WHAT TO EXPECT: POST-ANESTHESIA CARE UNIT

UPMC Shadyside

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU). We are dedicated to providing the highest level of care to our patients. The goal of this guide is to give you a better understanding of the PACU. Through each step, we will try to clearly explain every aspect of care. Let this information be your guide as you wait for your loved one to recover after anesthesia.

POST-ANESTHESIA CARE UNIT

After receiving anesthesia for a surgery or procedure, a patient is sent to the PACU to recover and wake up. The PACU is a critical care unit where the patient's vital signs are closely observed, pain management begins, and fluids are given. The nursing staff is skilled in recognizing and managing problems in patients after receiving anesthesia. The PACU is under the direction of the Department of Anesthesiology.

THE PACU PATIENT EXPERIENCE

Patients are admitted to the PACU immediately after surgery.

What to Expect:

- You will have monitors attached to you that take your vital signs every 5 to 15 minutes, unless your condition requires more attention.
- You may have an oxygen mask or nose prongs to help you breathe, as necessary.
- Your surgical site will be examined.
- Intravenous fluids will be checked.
- A report will be taken by the anesthesia provider and the operating room nurse. This information is required in order to plan your care.



Comfort After Surgery:

- It is common to experience a sore throat, aching muscles, or a feeling of being ill for up to 24 hours.
- You may experience shivering following surgery. Your PACU nurse will provide warmed blankets and, if necessary, a special blanket that circulates warm air. If shivering is extreme, you will be given medication.
- Nausea and vomiting may occur. If you have a history of motion sickness or nausea and vomiting following anesthesia, it is important to inform the anesthesiologist prior to surgery. It may be possible to give you medication before or during surgery to decrease the likelihood of this occurring. If you experience nausea or vomiting in the PACU, your nurse will administer medication through your IV line to alleviate your discomfort.
- Pain is common after surgery. It is important that you describe exactly how much pain you are feeling on a scale of zero to 10. Zero means no pain and 10 means the worst pain you can imagine. Based on your level of pain, we will give you pain medication to make you feel more comfortable.

Radios, iPads, and Laptops

If you are awake and comfortable, we have radios, iPads, and laptops you can use for listening to music, watching television or videos, playing computer games, checking emails, and surfing the Web. You also may let your nurse know if you would like to use an iPad to talk remotely with a family member or loved one who may be waiting to see how you are doing.

Length of Stay

Every patient's length of stay in the PACU is different, but on average it is usually one to three hours. This depends on factors such as type of surgery, the patient's response to surgery and anesthesia, and medical history. Most patients remember very little regarding their recovery room experience.



If a patient has to stay longer than expected, family needn't worry. A longer stay may be necessary to ensure that the patient receives the best care possible and that they are comfortable before being discharged.

Discharge

Depending on their type of surgery or procedure, a patient is discharged from the PACU to an appropriate inpatient room (for an extended stay), or back to the Day of Surgery Unit (before discharge home). This decision is based on several conditions:

- Recovery from anesthesia:
 - > For general anesthesia, the patient should be awake and returned to a normal mental state.
 - > For spinal anesthesia, the patient must be able to feel and move their legs the way they could before surgery.
- Vital signs need to be stable.
- Depending on the surgery and type of anesthesia, a patient may require medicines that help control heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, or disorders such as diabetes, which may require a longer stay in the PACU.
- Pain should be under control and manageable.
- If a patient is experiencing severe nausea or vomiting, a longer stay in the PACU is necessary.
- Baseline temperature must be normal.

- Excessive shivering and loss of body heat due to anesthesia may require a longer stay in the PACU.

After all of the discharge criteria are met, a patient is discharged by their anesthesiologist to an inpatient room or to the Day of Surgery Unit (if you are going home).

Room Assignments

Patients who are staying at the hospital will be assigned a room as soon as one is available. Although surgery is prescheduled in most cases, rooms are not assigned until the patient is ready to leave the PACU and a room is available. Often patients and families may request a private room. While we understand a patient's desire to have a private room, many considerations must go into the placement of patients in rooms, such as gender, surgical specialties, infections, and hospital census. We try to honor requests for private rooms, but if we are unable to do so we want to assure you the patient's care will not be affected.

FAMILY AND VISITOR INFORMATION

In the Surgical Family Lounge

In the Surgical Family Lounge you are welcome to watch television, use your cell phone, enjoy coffee, use the computers, or bring in food from the cafeteria or elsewhere. If you do not have a cell phone, family and friends may call you on the Surgical Family Lounge telephone at **412-623-3620**. Keep in mind that our doctors and nurses call in on these phones to speak with patients' families. Please keep personal calls on these phones very brief.

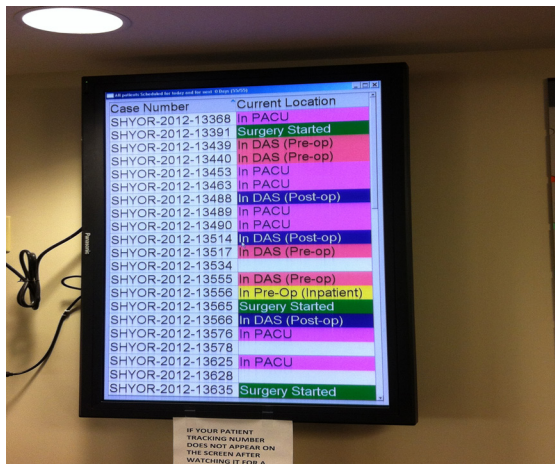
It is very important to assign a family member or friend to stay in the Surgical Family Lounge until the surgeon calls or comes down after surgery. It also is important to identify one person to communicate with the surgeon, and the Operating Room and PACU staff. When entering or leaving the Surgical Family Lounge please advise one of our staff greeters, and if possible, give the greeter a phone number where we can reach you. Please talk to a greeter if you have any questions or concerns. They are trained to assist you while your loved one is in surgery or the PACU. The Surgical Family Lounge is staffed Monday through Friday, from 4:30 to 8:30 p.m.

During Surgery

Your surgeon most likely informed you of approximately how long surgery will take. However, start times for surgery are sometimes delayed for many reasons. Operating Room staff may call family or loved ones in the Surgical Family Lounge if there have been delays. If the surgery has lasted longer than expected and you have not received news, you may ask a greeter to contact the Operating Room for an update.

Surgical Communication Tracking Board

A communication board is located in the lounge that tracks your loved one's location throughout the surgical process. The staff in the Surgical Family Lounge can help with any questions you might have regarding the tracking board.



Speaking With the Doctor

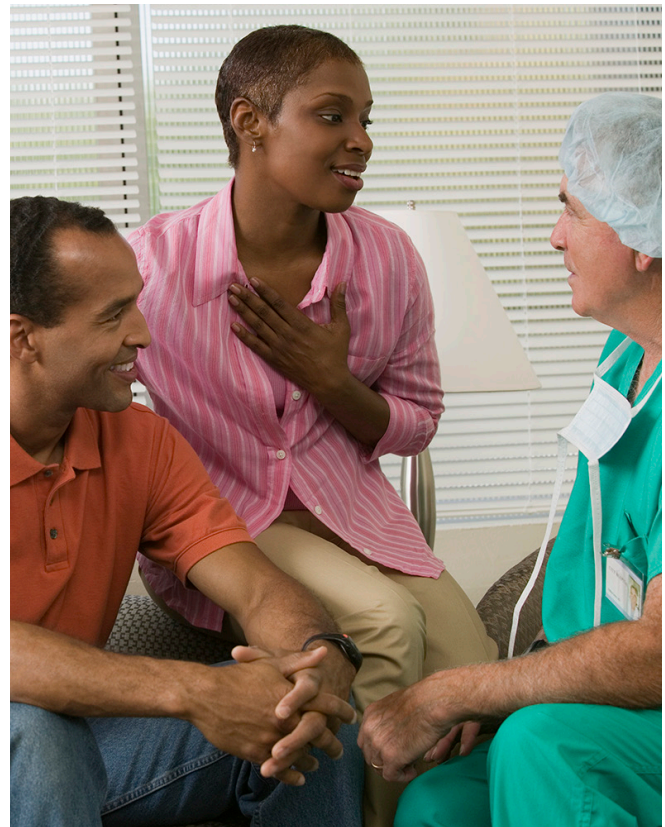
Your loved one's surgeon will reach out to you after the surgery or procedure is complete. However, some do it differently than others:

- Some call the Surgical Family Lounge by phone.
- Some come to the Surgical Family Lounge to speak in person.
- Some do not call immediately after surgery, but wait until they have finished several surgeries.

After the surgeon has spoken with you, you may leave the Surgical Family Lounge. Before you leave, give the greeter a phone number where you can be contacted.

Visiting the PACU

We know you are anxious to see your loved one after surgery. We ask that you please wait one hour after surgery to allow PACU staff to concentrate on



providing the best care possible. When the PACU nurse has your loved one settled in the unit, they will call the Surgical Family Lounge to update you on your loved one's plan of care.

Visiting is limited in the PACU for the safety and confidentiality of patients. When your loved one's nurse determines that a visit is safe, the nursing staff will call one visitor for a five-minute visit with the patient in the PACU. If there are other family members and friends who wish to communicate with your loved one, iPads can be used to video conference between the PACU and the Surgical Family Lounge.

The PACU is a secure department. Visitors will be given directions about entering the PACU by greeters in the Surgical Family Lounge.

Entering the PACU

For the safety and well-being of patients:

- Visitors must be accompanied by a PACU staff member.
- Visit is limited to five minutes.
- Do not bring food or drink into the PACU.
- Do not bring cell phones or cameras into the PACU.



- Visitors must be 14 years of age or older.
- Visitors must feel comfortable in a medical setting.
- Remain calm and supportive to the patient.
- Follow all directions of PACU staff.
- Utilize hand sanitizer at entrance to the PACU.

What to Expect When Visiting the PACU

- The PACU is a large room where many patients recover at the same time. Bed areas are separated by curtains.
- The environment may be noisy, due to the large volume of patients, staff, machines, and activity.
- Every patient will have an intravenous catheter.
- Most patients will have oxygen for a period of time. They also may need to have oxygen when going to an inpatient room.
- Each patient will be on a cardiac monitor that looks like a computer screen with many cables and wires attached to the patient. The monitor has alarms that alert the staff of any changes. Often the alarm goes off due to patient movement or interference. We will let you know if an alarm needs to be addressed.

- Some patients have tubes, drains, and medical equipment attached. These will be explained to you by the nurse.
- Patients often require x-rays immediately after surgery, or sometimes emergencies can occur in the PACU. In these instances, you may be asked to return to the Surgical Family Lounge.
- After having a surgical procedure and receiving anesthesia, patients may tell you they have a sore throat from a breathing tube, have nausea or discomfort, or complain of being cold. The PACU nurse is trained to address these issues.
- Anesthesia medications may cause changes in a patient's blood pressure, heart rate, respirations, and other levels, such as blood sugars. If you have been told your loved one is having one of these parameters treated, please understand that this is a normal occurrence in the PACU. The PACU nurse is trained to treat these occurrences as the patient recovers from anesthesia.

Please remember how important it is that your loved one rest after surgery. We ask that you help us by allowing your loved one to rest, which will help them receive the full benefit of their pain medication.

We understand that it may be hard for you to see your loved one in pain or discomfort. Please do not feel that you must visit in the PACU. Your loved one will receive the best care possible, and you will receive updates on their condition throughout the recovery process.

If we cannot answer your questions or explain a situation fully at the moment you inquire, we will be sure to attend to your concerns as soon as we can.

Phone Calls into the PACU

Due to the busy nature of the PACU, phone calls are not allowed into the unit. If you are waiting for information on your loved one, the PACU nurse will contact the Surgical Family Lounge. You can expect a phone call from a PACU nurse within 90 minutes of your loved one's arrival in the PACU.

While You Wait

We have listed places in the hospital you may want to visit while you wait. Our greeters also can give you information about restaurants, transportation, shopping, lodging, and other services in the UPMC Shadyside neighborhood. If at any time you have questions or concerns, please let the greeters know. We will do our best to meet your needs.

Places to Visit in the Hospital:

Cafeteria

Posner Tower, First Floor, near Gift Shop
6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., and 2 to 4 a.m.

Chapel

Posner Tower, First Floor, across from Surgical Family Lounge
Open 24 Hours

Gift Shop

Posner Tower, First Floor, near Cafeteria
Weekdays: 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Weekends: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Hopwood Library (for patients and families)

West Wing Concourse, First Floor
Weekdays: 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Sundays: noon to 6 p.m.
Closed Saturday
Phone: **412-623-2620**

Japanese Garden

Posner Tower, outside Main Entrance
Open 24 Hours





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5230 Centre Ave.
Pittsburgh, PA 15232

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