

# Your emergency operation

Information for general surgical patients



## **The Royal Cornwall Hospital General Surgical Unit**

The Royal Cornwall Hospital admits 7,000-8,000 surgical patients per year on an emergency basis. Around 40% of emergency admissions require an operation during their inpatient stay. Between admission and discharge, 20 or more healthcare professionals may have been involved with your care.

### **Waiting for your emergency inpatient operation**

Your doctors have decided that you need an operation that should be carried out as an inpatient, rather than on a scheduled 'elective' basis. This means that you will be prepared for surgical theatre on the emergency or 'CEPOD' list. The CEPOD list is a permanently staffed operating theatre that can run on a 24 hour basis. This resource is shared amongst surgical specialities that may need to conduct urgent or emergency operations. The order is arranged according to clinical priority, which is decided between the doctors. The priorities may change throughout the day or night as new patients arrive requiring emergency treatment. You can discuss the urgency of your operation with the doctors responsible for your care.

### **What happens before theatre?**

You will be admitted by the junior doctors and nursing staff, who will arrange initial investigations such as blood tests. A senior doctor will review your case and inform you as to whether you may need an operation. You will then go through the process of informed consent for the operation and a safety checklist will be completed at several stages in relation to your care. A member of the anaesthetic team will see you, review your case and discuss the anaesthetic options for your operation.

### **Why can't I eat or drink?**

You will be seen by an anaesthetist during your admission in preparation for your operation. They will go through aspects of your general health and discuss anaesthetic options and if required, discuss specific post-operative pain relief with you.

While you are waiting for your operation, you will be asked to stay 'nil-by-mouth', meaning you are not allowed to eat or drink before your operation, ideally for six hours. This is to provide as safe an anaesthetic as possible, to

reduce the risk of regurgitation of stomach contents when you are anaesthetised. Sometimes, the urgency of your operation may mean we need to take you to theatre when you have a full stomach, or you are feeling sick. While this slightly increases the risk, we take measures to try to prevent any problems during your anaesthetic.

Although we ask you to stay nil-by-mouth, we may ask you to take all or some of your normal tablets and painkillers, so please ask the nursing staff for analgesia if you are in pain.

### **What happens if my operation is postponed or cancelled?**

We aim to perform every operation in a safe and timely fashion. However, the nature of urgent and emergency surgical care means that new, more urgent cases can present throughout the day and may need to be operated on before you. We must prioritise operations to those individuals with the greatest clinical need. If your operation is postponed, we will where possible offer you food and can provide analgesia as required throughout your inpatient stay. The operating team will try to discuss with you any reasons for a delay, but sometimes are involved with the on-going care of other patients and may not be able to see you at the time.

### **The next patient arrived after me, so why are they having an operation first?**

This is based on individual diagnoses and clinical priority as assessed by the surgical team.

### **Does delaying my operation put me at risk?**

Operations are conducted on clinical priority. As an inpatient, your observations and test results are constantly under review by nursing staff and doctors who continue to assess the urgency of your case.

### **Who can I ask about my care?**

Please feel free to discuss your care at any point through the day or night with members of the nursing staff or surgical team.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

