

INTERMEDIATE CARE UNIT

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is the “Intermediate Care Unit”?

The Intermediate Care Unit is for individuals that require closer monitoring than is provided on the general medical or surgical units. Many patients on the Intermediate Care Unit require an *intravenous catheter* or *heparin lock*, *continuous telemetry monitoring*, *serial electrocardiograms*, and *serial enzymes* to allow the specially trained nurses and physicians to closely monitor their condition.

What is an intravenous catheter or heparin lock?

Certain medications or treatments require direct access into a vein. In these situations, a skilled healthcare professional inserts a needle into a vein. This needle is called an intravenous catheter. When the catheter is attached to long tubing and then to a bag of fluid or medicine, it is called an intravenous or IV. When the catheter is attached to a small amount of tubing and taped onto back of the hand, it is called a heparin lock. A heparin lock permits your nurse to give you medication or attach an IV if needed.

What is a telemetry monitor?

A telemetry monitor is a portable box that when attached to you, displays your heart rate and rhythm at a central station. Specially trained nurses and technicians continuously assess your heart rate and rhythm and keep your physician informed regarding your progress. The monitor will alarm if you have any abnormal rhythm and will print out a strip of that rhythm for your physician to review.

- A telemetry monitor is portable, it fits into a pocket and does not restrict your movement or prevent you from using the bathroom.
- Five tiny wires or electrodes are taped to your arms or shoulders and your chest.
- Signals from the electrodes show your physician how your heart is beating.
- Records of your heart rhythm are shared with your physician. This information is used as an aid to diagnosis and to plan your treatment.
- You will be hooked up to a telemetry monitor for the duration of your stay in the intensive care unit or telemetry.

What is an electrocardiogram?

An electrocardiogram (EKG) is a simple test that records the electrical activity of your heart. This heart's electrical activity is recorded from many angles and helps your physician to diagnose or rule out abnormalities.

How is an EKG performed?

Specially trained nurses or technicians will perform the EKG.

- This test only takes a few minutes to complete, has no side effects and does not hurt.
- You will be asked to lie quietly on your back.
- Ten electrodes are taped to your body: 1 on each arm, 1 on each leg and 6 on your chest around your heart.
- A record of your heart's electrical activity, rate and rhythm are shared with your physician. This information is used as an aid to diagnosis and to plan your treatment.
- Several EKGs may be needed over the duration of your stay. A series of EKGs taken to monitor your heart's electrical activity over a period of time is called a **Serial EKG**.

What are serial enzymes?

Serial enzymes are blood samples that are taken on a scheduled basis to look for chemicals (or enzymes) that are released into the blood stream when there is damage to the heart muscle. A single elevation of enzymes does not always indicate a problem. Following the level of enzymes over a period of time helps your physician to diagnosis a heart attack and to evaluate possible damage to the heart.

If you have any additional questions about the intermediate care unit, please ask your nurse or physician.