

COMA AND REDUCED ALERTNESS

COMA AND UNCONSCIOUSNESS

After a traumatic injury a patient may be unconscious for some time. This can be due to different reasons. If a patient is very unwell they may go to critical care/intensive care. There they may be placed in a medically induced coma while they get better. This is called sedation with medication. Once a patient is more stable the doctors will reduce the medication to try and wake up a patient.

Some patients with head injuries they may not wake up immediately, and in some cases they could remain, which looks to be asleep, for a long time after leaving intensive care. If someone does not 'wake up' they may be diagnosed with prolonged disorders of consciousness. This diagnosis will only be given after several months of the patient not responding to people or sounds around them even if their eyes may be open at times.

REDUCED AWARENESS, DISORIENTATION AND CONFUSION

Some patients are very confused after a traumatic injury. This can be due to a head injury, the medication they received, such as sedation in critical care, or the shock from the accident. The medical team and therapy team will assess a patient to determine what could be the cause of the confusion. There is a tool called the Rancho Los Amigos scale that is used in some centres which helps to explain the behaviour of patients.

POST TRAUMATIC AMNESIA (PTA)

Some patients with a head injury may be in post-traumatic amnesia (PTA). This is a period after the injury where they are confused and agitated. This can be quite distressing for family members as patients often cannot recognise their loved ones and do not know where they are or what happened. During this time patients are unable to remember any new information and they may wander around or be unable to find their room.

Useful Organisations

- Headway: <https://www.headway.org.uk/about-brain-injury/>
- ICUSteps: <http://www.icusteps.org/>
- National Clinical Guidelines for minimal consciousness (includes information for family and friends on medical decisions for people in this state) <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/guidelines-policy/prolonged-disorders-consciousness-national-clinical-guidelines#attachments%20>
- Post traumatic amnesia [https://www.headway.org.uk/about-brain-injury/further-information/common-brain-injury-terms/?searchTerm=Post-traumatic%20amnesia%20\(PTA\)](https://www.headway.org.uk/about-brain-injury/further-information/common-brain-injury-terms/?searchTerm=Post-traumatic%20amnesia%20(PTA))