

Waking Up and ICU

Some form of consciousness returned in the recovery room, I still had the intubation tubing in then because I could feel it lodged in my throat, however I didn't know it was that until I also felt them remove it later, it was instant relief when they did pull it out so I was glad about that. It was in there that my consultant's clinical nurse lead's voice told me that my mum was outside, but she couldn't see my sister. The theatre team hadn't catheterised me as planned, and whilst I had managed to pass 500mls, my body then gave up from exhaustion so between the recovery room and ICU the staff were arguing over paperwork, the situation, and when to catheterise. I was too drugged to care, but I just wanted my bladder emptied. 40 minutes (I think) and a handover later, to my relief the problem was finally rectified.

I could hear quite a lot during my semi-conscious state even though I couldn't make sense of most of it, or put it in a logical time frame. There was something about my arterial line not working but still being able to obtain bloods, there was a reminder that I had a PCA laced with morphine in my hand so I should press that as and when needed. Conversations about fluids, oxygen and paperwork also took place.

Somewhere midst that my mum and sister came in, they reluctantly took the pictures I requested (so I could see what they could see when I was conscious) and eventually I became conscious enough to speak. I was very relieved to register that my voice still worked, I sounded out of it (because I was) but the main thing was that I could. I very briefly spoke to several family members over the phone whilst battling between conscious states and reassured them I was still alive and all was fine. I don't think they stayed long. At some point I also remember being very glad I could still move my hands. I don't know when it was, but whilst I was still in ICU, a member of my medical team did a neurological assessment, checking sensation and movement I think. I vaguely remember being asked to move my legs and feet too – at which point this was, I couldn't tell you either.

Once intubation was removed and it was just me and the oxygen mask, my mouth was very dry and I remember having to wait for somebody's presence to approach so I could request water between bouts of consciousness, which I had to sip through a straw pretty much still lying down. I couldn't move my head as my neck was far too sore and I pillows lodged either side of my head to keep it in position (this could have been on my request, not sure). And I remember I was most comfortable when it felt like the bed was tilted, but I think it was just a case of raising the foot-side higher, rather than an actual tilt.

During my time in ICU I could feel the blood pressure cuff, and sense movement, but I barely opened my eyes, at that time it just seemed too strenuous. The most movement I did was press the PCA or say a few words, and speaking was an effort in itself, it was a constant balance of weighing up whether or not I actually needed to speak (because it was painful at that stage), and the least amount of words that were required if the need outweighed the silence/wait.

The nurse gave me some form of bed-bath/ wipe down in ICU and changed my sheets and gown – I felt and heard all that. Eventually, I remember I had a teaspoon of yoghurt too and a physio told me what exercises I should try to do as often as possible. The IV bags kept being changed and my observations were never-ending. Not sure if I was promoted to an oxygen tube instead of the mask before or after returning to my bed on the ward. I didn't like ICU at all, I felt really uncomfortable there and it was the only place where the health professionals were both rude and insensitive.