

**INTENSIVE CARE DIARIES MAY REDUCE POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER SYMPTOMS**  
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**INTRODUCTION.** Diaries written during the patients stay in the intensive care unit (ICU) are becoming increasingly popular. Initially it was felt that these diaries would help patients understand their illness better and fill gaps in the patients memory for ICU(1). The impact of such diaries on psychological recovery has not been examined. During a project comparing the psychological recovery of patients we took the opportunity to examine the influence of diaries.

**METHODS.** The study was part of a prospective study undertaken in 5 ICUs examining the incidence of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In 3 of the study ICUs some patients received ICU diaries. The process of starting a diary was not randomised but done when staff had time. This was a pragmatic, opportunistic study of an intervention that was happening at the time of the main study. After ICU discharge the patients recall for ICU was assessed using the ICU Memory Tool(2). At three months post ICU discharge the presence of PTSD-related symptoms was assessed using the PTSS-14 screening tool.

**RESULTS.** 241 patients were recruited to the main study and 231 completed the 3 month follow-up. Of these patients 42 received an ICU diary. The level of PTSD-related symptoms at 3 months post ICU discharge was lower in those receiving an ICU diary (Mann-Whitney U  $p = 0.04$ ). When just those patients recalling delusional memories for ICU, e.g. nightmares, hallucinations, paranoid delusions, were examined, those receiving ICU diaries had much lower levels of PTSD-related symptoms compared to those who did not (Mann-Whitney U,  $p = 0.028$ ).

**CONCLUSION.** This study suggests that patients receiving an ICU diary have lower levels of PTSD-related symptoms. The diary may facilitate the working through of traumatic memories, particularly of delusions and be acting like a natural cognitive behavioural therapy. These results suggest that there is a need to perform an RCT of the impact of ICU diaries on psychological recovery.

**REFERENCE(S).** 1. Bäckman C, Walter SM. *Intens Care Med.* 2001;27:426-429 2. Jones C et al. *Clin Intens Care.* 2000;11(5):251-255.

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