Intensive Care Unit

Visiting Your Loved One in the Hospital
Inside the ICU
The ICU is a busy place and it is important to know what to expect. Be prepared to see many wires, tubes and other equipment. Your loved one may look or act different. There may be other patients with monitors in the same unit.

Your Loved One
Your loved one may be asleep or unconscious. Their skin may look pale, flushed or ashen (grayish) from a surgery or illness. They may look puffy or swollen, especially the face, hands and feet. He or she may feel cold or clammy. This is the body’s normal reaction to stress, low blood pressure, certain medications or some diseases.

Monitors
Monitors have alarms that send a signal to the nurse when something may need to be checked. It is important to remember that alarms are not always cause for concern. Sometimes even a patient’s slight move can sound the alarm.

Ventilator
Patients in the ICU frequently need extra oxygen. It is usually given through a face mask, ventilator or nasal cannula. A ventilator is a machine that helps a person breathe. Your loved one may be connected to a ventilator by a special tube if they have breathing problems. The tube goes in through the nose and mouth. They are unable to speak while on the ventilator, so flash cards or a writing tablet may help in communicating.

Tests
Frequent tests and treatments are done. You may be asked to leave the room so the area is clear around the patient. Blood may be drawn frequently, but don’t worry. The body contains a large volume of blood and slowly replaces any blood drawn.

Medication
Medications can cause sleepiness, nausea or confusion. Your loved one may be receiving several types of medication, including antibiotics, sedatives or pain medication. Let the nurse know if your loved one seems to be in pain.

IV Lines and Tubes
Your loved one may have one or more IV (intravenous) lines and tubes in place. These IV tubes and lines help drain or suction fluids or air from the body, provide nutrition and medication or measure blood or heart pressure.

Intensivists
CHI St. Alexius Health’s intensivists are specialists in critical care medicine. They provide in-depth care to ICU patients with life-threatening illness or after a major surgery. They are present in the hospital 24 hours a day to treat your loved one. They provide life-saving interventions without delay, when needed.
What You Can Do

Provide Comfort
Your loved one may seem confused, excited, angry, and forgetful and may not recognize you. This is common in ICU patients. It may be due to medication, new surroundings or the illness or trauma itself. You can help by reminding them what day and time it is. Talk about pleasant things such as family events. When they feel better, bring a magazine or newspaper to share.

Giving Personal Care
Just being with your loved one is important, but there are other ways you can help. Check with the nurse first about:

- Brushing or combing your loved one’s hair
- Putting a cool cloth on their forehead
- Rubbing lotion on their dry skin
- Swabbing their mouth