Sepsis and Your Hospital Stay

Sepsis is a whole body response to an infection. The source of infection can be easy or hard to find. Common symptoms are: fast heart beats, rapid or labored breathing, fever, confusion, sleepiness, dehydration, and even falling down. Sepsis can affect various organs in your body. Patients with Sepsis can either be critically ill or can remain relatively stable. Sepsis can occur at any age.

Exams by your nurses and doctors will help to find out why you are sick. We will draw blood for lab work. We will collect urine and blood for tests that tell us what type of bacteria is growing (cultures). We might need an EKG to see how your heart is feeling and X-rays or other imaging to help find where your infection is. We will check your vital signs, meaning we will assess your heart rate, your breathing pattern and how well you move oxygen through your body, blood pressure, and temperature. We will also assess you for pain and work to make you comfortable.

Planning your care starts as soon as you arrive. It is important that we work fast in the beginning to stop you from getting sicker. The first six hours are critical! You can expect one or more IVs, or possibly a central line (a special type of IV that delivers medications and fluids close to your heart for faster results and allows us to give you more than one medication at once), fluids, and medications. You might need oxygen to help you breathe. You might need a urinary catheter so that we can monitor your urine output closely. Depending on your condition, you may need other things as well. We will include you in these discussions so that you know what is happening.

Staying in the hospital until you are healthy enough to go home is important. Depending on how sick you are, you might need to be in the hospital for only a few days or for a longer period of time. As we learn more about your infection and the ways in which it has affected your body, we will discuss your individual needs with you and will update you with an expected length of stay.

Isolation may be necessary depending on what type of infection you have and where in your body it is. This means that your all of your care providers, as well as any visitors, may be asked to wear special gowns, gloves, and/or masks when visiting you. If you leave your room, you may be asked to wear these items as well. This is to help spread infection to others. Sepsis itself is not contagious, however the infection causing it may be.

Sepsis can be scary! We want you to ask questions while you are here with us. Getting you healthy includes keeping you informed and including you in your care decisions. We will help you understand why you got sick, how we are working to make you better, and what you need to do when you leave to continue to recover.