



WEANING: MYTH VS. REALITY

Being placed on a ventilator is an extremely stressful event. The very idea causes anxiety about not being able to come off the ventilator, and the most common reaction is to want to get off of the ventilator as quickly as possible. While this is completely understandable, it is also not necessarily the safest thing to do.

When someone is placed on a ventilator in the hospital, the goal is to get them better and off the ventilator while they are still there. Sometimes this is successful, especially when there are few other medical conditions complicating matters. However, when people have other problems, especially lung problems, it makes getting off the ventilator that much harder, if not impossible.

At Fox Subacute, our goal is to get people from the ventilator as quickly as possible. Shortly after admission, we will perform the weaning parameters. Once these are done, the team will discuss with you and your family the results, and come up with a plan of action taking into account all of the other issues that are present. We will be as aggressive as possible while maintaining medical safety to the best of our ability. Our goal is to get people off the ventilator safely, even if this means taking things a little more slowly. Certainly if someone shows all of the signs of being able to wean more quickly we will not hold people back, but safety is our highest concern.

We realize that the goal is to get off the ventilator as quickly as possible. However, we would like to clear up some common misconceptions regarding the weaning process to allow you to look forward to what can be expected:

MYTH: MOST PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO WEAN IN THE ICU

REALITY: Up to 20% (1 out of every 5 people) placed on a ventilator in the hospital will fail to wean in the hospital and require a weaning program at another facility. In fact, of these people, it is estimated that an average of about half of these people (34-60%) can be weaned in a post-acute setting such as Fox Subacute.

MYTH: WEANING FASTER IS BETTER

REALITY: Of the people who are on a ventilator for more than 21 days or fail to wean in the acute setting (ICU), the best chance to wean occurs in the first 3 months. Although there is still a chance to wean after this, most progress is made during this time period. Also, people who are weaned too quickly may be able to come off the ventilator initially, but are at a much higher risk for having to be placed back on the ventilator in the future. Should this happen, the chances of weaning again are much less.

MYTH: PATIENTS SHOULD BE CONTINUOUSLY PUSHED TO WEAN

REALITY: You will hear us speak about "weaning parameters" frequently. These are tests that we use to determine whether someone is strong enough to start or continue the weaning program. Standardized

weaning parameters such as those used at Fox have been shown to predict with reasonable certainty who will be able to be weaned and who will not. It has also been shown that pushing someone who does not do well with the parameters can cause worsening respiratory muscle weakness as well as place people at more risk for infections, aspiration, and other complications, all of which could be devastating to any future progress.

MYTH: CONTINUED WEANING DURING AN ACUTE ILLNESS IS SAFE

REALITY: We will typically hold someone's wean if they develop a fever, infection, or another acute problem. This is because the physical work of breathing is a tremendous strain on the body. Imagine how you feel when you are sick and can't get out of bed. Now imagine trying to work to breathe as well. It would be impossible. Weaning during an acute illness can cause further setbacks. Likewise, weaning while someone is healing a wound or struggling with physical therapy can also be detrimental. Should this arise, we will discuss the situation with the patient and family and together come up with a plan of action.

MYTH: PEOPLE ON A VENTILATOR CAN NOT ENJOY A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE

REALITY: Even those people who are not able to wean can enjoy a reasonable quality of life. In some cases, it is even better, as they are not constantly struggling to breathe as they may have been in the past. At Fox, we have many daily activities, and frequent community outings to shopping, movies, malls, etc., that the residents look forward to and are active participants. We also host holiday parties for residents and their families. Private family gatherings are also encouraged, and every accommodation (as possible) is made for private space in our facility for your family. Residents are also allowed to travel outside of the facility with family for events, with certain restrictions for safety purposes.

At Fox Subacute, we will work with you towards our common goal of getting you free from the ventilator. We use a team approach, and the most vital part of the team is you. We will certainly take your wishes into consideration and hope that you will take our experience and medical input into consideration as well. We have regular care conferences to discuss concerns and progress, as well as plans for the next period of time, and the physicians are always available to discuss and questions you may have in-between the conferences.

Fox Subacute has been in the business of ventilator weaning for over 20 years and our track record speaks for itself. We pride ourselves in being the best at what we do, and look forward to proving to you why.



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