Accidental awareness under anaesthesia

This leaflet is being given to you because you have described an episode of awareness under anaesthesia. It is very important that we provide you with information and keep in contact so that we can follow you up for any issues you may experience as a result of this episode.

What is accidental awareness under anaesthesia?

Accidental awareness is when a patient is temporarily conscious during a general anaesthetic and can remember things that happened during surgery, perhaps feeling pain or being unable to move. However, more commonly, awareness occurs during the transition at the very start or end of a general anaesthetic (i.e. before and after surgery), as the patient is going to sleep or waking up. Although accidental awareness during general anaesthesia is rare, and the experiences usually only last for a few seconds or minutes, the complication remains an important concern for both patients and anaesthetists.

What happens next?

A senior anaesthetist will contact you to ask you to describe your experience and to assess what factors may have caused you to recall events around the time of your operation. We aim to contact you as soon as possible after the event and will follow you up over the next couple of weeks. Depending on your experience they will be able to provide more information and if needed they will also refer you for follow up to our Recovery after Critical Illness team, who are able to provide support for people who have been through a difficult experience.

Contact details

Below are the contact details of the Anaesthetic and Recovery after Critical Illness teams, who would be happy to talk to you and answer any other questions you may have.

Anaesthetist responsible for your follow up:

Tel: 0118 322 7068

Anaesthetic Department, Royal Berkshire Hospital, London Road, Reading RG1 5AN

Recovery after Critical Illness Team, Tel: 0118 322 7248 (answerphone)
Email: rbb-tr.raci@nhs.net

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Anaesthetic Department, November 2026. Next review due: November 2028.