BENDIGO HEALTH INTRODUCED PATIENT DIARIES IN 2013 TO HELP PATIENTS UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THEIR ILLNESS AND TO COME TO TERMS WITH THEIR MEMORIES. RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT PATIENTS CAN BECOME STRESSED AND ANXIOUS WHEN THEY DO NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT HAS BEEN WRONG WITH THEM. THE DIARY HAS SHOWN TO REDUCE STRESS IN PATIENTS IN THE MONTHS AFTER THEIR STAY AT THE HOSPITAL.
Some years ago, Alicia suffered from a work-related back injury requiring two spinal fusions to stop the pain. In 2009, her work at the Police Force brought her to fight the Black Saturday bushfires in Kilmore, which proved so demanding that she was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Alicia struggled with both physical and mental recovery, and not being able to get the full support she needed, her health eventually took a dramatic course towards the worse. In 2013, a series of health conditions brought her close to death. Due to previous health issues, Alicia had suffered from pneumonia over 40 times in the past two years. On one Sunday night she was taken by ambulance to the Bendigo Health Emergency Department, and everyone thought it was just another bought of pneumonia. This time however, Alicia was diagnosed with an acute pneumococcal pneumonia that had severely affected her lungs. Additionally, she had gastroparesis (a form of paralysis of the stomach) and aspiration pneumonia. Alicia was put in a medically induced coma to give her the life-saving treatment that she urgently needed.

Husband Craig was called in and told that Alicia had a fifty-fifty chance to survive. Doctors kept watch for minute changes for signs of improvement. Alicia was fighting to stay alive. Meanwhile, her husband juggled duties at home and school with the children, and the hospital to stay with Alicia. “He was a tower of strength and love to us, and continues to be. He never asks anything in return, he is just amazing”, said Alicia as we interviewed her. After a week in a coma, she woke up and had finally turned the corner.

Alicia visited the hospital quite a bit in the past year, and her health slowly started to gain steadier ground. “My family and I cannot speak highly enough of the staff at the Bendigo Health Emergency Department, and everyone thought it was just another bought of pneumonia. This time however, Alicia was diagnosed with an acute pneumococcal pneumonia that had severely affected her lungs. Additionally, she had gastroparesis (a form of paralysis of the stomach) and aspiration pneumonia. Alicia was put in a medically induced coma to give her the life-saving treatment that she urgently needed.

A year after the events, Alicia was able to reflect back on what really happened. “One thing that helped me through is the Patient Diary,” she explained and opened her personal diary which was full of hand-written messages from staff who were involved in her treatment and recovery. “The staff in the Intensive Care Unit wrote things during their shifts. Reading through the diary made it clearer to me what I was going through. It was too painful to read for quite some time, so I waited until my health was more settled. It has a feel of a real diary and I will keep it for myself always.”

The Patient Diaries were introduced to the Intensive Care Unit in 2013. “I’d certainly recommend the diary to other patients and families”, Alicia continued. “If something critical could possibly happen to you, I would certainly encourage everyone, including your family, to write and add photographs in a diary like this. Thanks to my diary I can see down the track where I am up to each six or twelve months and I will be able to use it with future health practitioners.”

Alicia Hall