

# States of Disordered Consciousness



## **Coma**

In a coma, an individual demonstrates no wakefulness or responsiveness to any type of stimulation. When your loved one is in a coma you will observe the following:

- Their eyes remain closed.
- They show no response to pain or things they hear or feel.
- They demonstrate no movement.

When your loved one is in a coma, you may hear your treatment team refer to this stage as Rancho Level 1.

## **Vegetative State (also known as Unresponsive Wakefulness Syndrome)**

In a vegetative state (unresponsive wakefulness), an individual has periods of time when they are awake and will demonstrate generalized responses to stimulation. Generalized responses are behaviors that occur due to reflexes or happen automatically. An individual in this state may move, but all movements are reflexive and are not purposefully controlled. It can be difficult for family members to determine whether a movement is voluntarily controlled or is an automatic, reflexive response. If you have any questions about the type of responses that your loved one is showing, please ask a member of your treatment team.

When your loved one is in a vegetative state (unresponsive wakefulness), you may observe some of the following behaviors:

- They open their eyes.
- They react to pain by posturing or pulling away.
- They show signs of hearing and reacting to sound. You may see them blink in response to a loud noise or turn their head or eyes in the direction of a noise.
- They reflexively blink in response to a visual threat.
- They make reflexive movements with their mouth. (e.g. biting down on a toothbrush, coughing, swallowing)

When your loved one is in a vegetative state (unresponsive wakefulness), you may hear the treatment team refer to this stage as Rancho Level 2.

## **Minimally Conscious State**

In a minimally conscious state, an individual has periods of wakefulness and will show purposeful responses in reaction to things happening around them. Purposeful responses are behaviors that show that an individual is gaining awareness of things happening to them and are beginning to interact with things in their environment.

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When your loved one is in a minimally conscious state, you may observe some of the following behaviors:

- They open their eyes and are awake for longer periods during the day.
- They react to pain by trying to remove whatever is causing them discomfort. (e.g. pushing your hand away, pulling at a catheter)
- They follow simple 1-step commands.
- They follow people moving around their room with their eyes.
- They reach for and grasp objects.
- They inconsistently and inaccurately answer simple yes/no questions.

When your loved one is in a minimally conscious state, you may hear the treatment team refer to this stage as Rancho Level 3.