

Reference:	FOI.20799.26
Subject:	Traumatic rib fractures
Date of Request:	1 June 2026

Requested:

Single-shot chest wall blocks in the Emergency Department

1. Does your Trust provide single-shot ultrasound-guided chest wall blocks (e.g. serratus anterior plane block [SAPB] or erector spinae plane block [ESPB]) for adults with traumatic rib fractures in the Emergency Department prior to hospital admission?
 - If yes:
 - a. Which specialty or specialties perform these blocks (e.g. Emergency Medicine, Anaesthetics, Critical Care)?
 - b. Are these blocks delivered as part of a formal pathway or standard clinical practice?
 - c. Following a single-shot block, is it standard practice for patients to be considered for escalation to a continuous chest wall catheter (e.g. SAPB or ESPB catheter) and/or epidural analgesia?
 - If not:
 - d. If single-shot chest wall blocks are not routinely performed in the Emergency Department, are they routinely performed later during the patient's admission for traumatic rib fractures?
 - e. Which specialty or specialties perform these blocks ?

Continuous chest wall catheter techniques

2. Does your Trust provide continuous chest wall catheter techniques (e.g. SAPB or ESPB catheters) for adults admitted with traumatic rib fractures?
 - If yes:
 - a. Which specialty or specialties perform these procedures?
 - b. In which clinical areas are these procedures typically performed (e.g. Emergency Department, Anaesthetic Room, Operating Theatre, Critical Care Unit, Ward)?
 - c. Are patient selection criteria used (e.g. STUMBL Score, Battle Score, RibScore, or other risk stratification tools)? If so, please specify.

Policy and guidance

3. Please attach a copy of all the specific guidelines and/or protocol and/or standard operational procedure for the chest wall blocks (including any competence/training/education if one is in place)
 - If no specific local guideline or SOP exists for this, please explicitly state 'No local guideline held'

Physiotherapy management of rib fractures

4. Does your Trust provide specific physiotherapy interventions for adults with traumatic rib fractures, including patients discharged directly from the Emergency Department? Examples may include incentive spirometry, breathing exercises, respiratory physiotherapy, kinesiology taping (K-tape), or other structured interventions.
 - If yes:

- a. Please describe the interventions provided.
 - b. Please provide copies of any associated guidelines, pathways, SOPs, patient information leaflets, or physiotherapy protocols.
- If no such documents are held, please state: "No local guideline held."

Other rib fracture management pathways

5. Please provide copies of any additional local guidelines, pathways, SOPs, protocols, or care bundles relating to the management of adults with traumatic rib fractures that have not already been provided in response to Questions 3 and 4.
- This includes the Emergency Department, inpatient, surgical, medical, trauma, critical care, and physiotherapy pathways.
 - If no additional documents are held, please state: "No other local guideline held."

Patient disposition

6. For adults with multiple traumatic rib fractures who do not require Level 2 or Level 3 care, to which ward or specialty area are they most commonly admitted?

Specialty

7. In your Trust, which parent speciality or specialities (e.g. Emergency Medicine, Frailty, Respiratory, Trauma & Orthopaedics, Cardiothoracic, or General Surgery) mainly look after adults with multiple rib fractures from blunt chest wall trauma as an inpatient for the first 5-7 days?

Response:

1. Hywel Dda University Health Board (UHB) confirms that single-shot ultrasound-guided chest wall blocks are provided for adults with traumatic rib fractures in the Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments prior to hospital admission.
- a. Anaesthetics/critical care doctors perform single-shot ultrasound-guided chest wall blocks.
 - b. Single-shot ultrasound-guided chest wall blocks are delivered as part of the UHB's Rib Fracture Guideline and Rural Trauma Facility and Prehospital Procedure.
 - c. Yes, following a single-shot block, it is standard practice for patients to be considered for escalation to a continuous chest wall catheter and/or epidural analgesia. However, this is not formalised, the focus of the UHB's guidance and pathways is the establishment of continuous regional analgesia.
2. The UHB provides the Erector Spinae Plane Block (ESPB) catheter technique for adults admitted with traumatic rib fractures. However, on occasion the Serratus Anterior Plane Block (SAPB) technique is used.
- a. Anaesthetics perform the ESPB and SAPB procedures.
 - b. The majority of these procedures are undertaken in Theatre. However, on occasion, some are placed within A&E, Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and very rarely on the ward.

c. Yes, the UHB uses the STUdy of the Management of BLunt chest trauma (STUMBL) criteria.

3. The UHB provides copies of its policies, procedures and guidelines relating to rib fractures and chest wall blocks at the following attachments:

- Attachment 1 – Guideline 711 - Inpatient Rib Fracture Management Guideline
- Attachment 2 – Guideline 1102 - Adult Continuous Regional Nerve Blocks for Acute Pain Management Clinical Guideline
- Attachment 3 – Policy 899 - Major Trauma Policy
- Attachment 4 – Procedure 900 - Rural Trauma Facility and Pre-hospital Procedure

Please note:- Attachments 3 and 4 have a review date of 3 July 2026 but are still current whilst going through the review process.

4. The UHB does provide specific physiotherapy interventions for adults with traumatic rib fractures, including for patients discharged directly from A&E departments. However, interventions are assessed by the UHB's Respiratory Physiotherapy team and managed on an individual needs basis.

- a. The interventions provided include Active Cycle of Breathing Technique (ACBT), mobilising, airway clearance techniques, supported cough and general education around rib fracture/pain and spirometry if needed.
- b. In addition to Attachment 1, the Physiotherapy Team and the Major Trauma Network have produced a chest injury discharge information leaflet. A copy is provided at Attachment 5.

5. In addition to the documents provided in response to question 3, the UHB uses the South Wales Trauma Network Clinical Guidance - Analgesia for Rib Fractures (Adult Major Trauma Patients), a copy is provided at Attachment 6. Again, this has a review date of March 2025 but it is currently in use.

6. Patients with multiple traumatic rib fractures are admitted under the Surgical specialty. Patients requiring continuous catheter blocks are accommodated on Cleddau ward in Glangwili General Hospital (GGH), as the UHB's Trauma Unit.

7. Please see response to question 6.