

THE ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT OF PAIN FOR PATIENTS WITH COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

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Background

- The assessment and treatment of pain in patients with cognitive impairment is particularly challenging.
- A variety of tools for assessing pain are available but none have been well validated for patients with cognitive impairment in the acute setting.
- The traditional use of numerical rating scores are relative to:
 - the degree of cognitive impairment,
 - the healthcare professional making the assessment,
 - the time it was recorded,
 - the purpose for which it was recorded.
- It has been argued, for this group of patients we should instead try to identify the absence or presence of pain, and look at the contributing factors for this.

Aims/Methods

- To review current practice of pain assessment in patients with cognitive impairment.
- A survey was distributed to staff working on surgical and medical wards regularly admitting cognitively impaired patients.

Results



Conclusion

- Routine use of numerical rating scores for cognitively impaired patients is possibly outdated.
- We have seen that nursing staff are already using alternative methods of pain assessment, and making their own assumption of pain scores.
- Assessing cognitive impaired patients for pain requires frequent observation of:
 - mood,
 - verbal cues,
 - facial expressions and
 - body changes;
- We are implementing a new assessment tool for use with cognitively impaired patients to be piloted over the next few months.

Pain Assessment in Patients with Cognitive Impairment

1. How confident are you in assessing pain in patients with cognitive impairment?

2. When do you assess pain in patients with cognitive impairment?

3. What alternative strategies do you use for assessing pain in patients with cognitive impairment?

4. Do you have any concerns giving patients with cognitive impairment opioid analgesia?

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