



June 21, 2017

Withdrawal: a patient safety risk

What happened?

Situation:

The patient exited bed with side rails up, fell to the floor, and sustained a catastrophic injury.

Background:

The patient was admitted to the hospital for issues related to alcohol use and injury at home due to a fall. The patient suffered another fall while in the hospital. Several contributing causes of the fall were identified including that appropriate interventions based on the CIWA (Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment) for the detoxing patient were not fully applied.

What went wrong?

Assessment:

CIWA assessments were performed but not at the frequency indicated based on the protocol. In addition, medications were not consistently given as indicated per the CIWA score due to unfamiliarity with the protocol. Benzodiazepines are used to control psychomotor agitation and prevent progression to more severe withdrawal. These interventions may have decreased agitation and reduced agitation-related fall risk factors. Unrecognized or undertreated withdrawal places the patient at high risk for withdrawal complications and injury. [Symptom triggered management of withdrawal is recommended.](#)

What are we doing?

Recommendation:

- Order sets should be used with all orders when ordering medications for withdrawal.
- Utilize the appropriate withdrawal assessment scale. Consult the physician if a scale may be needed but is not ordered or if the appropriate scale is not ordered.
 - CIWA- Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment (Alcohol withdrawal)
 - COWS- Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale
 - BWAS- Benzodiazepine Withdrawal Assessment Scale
- Follow frequency of assessment and associated interventions as indicated in the order set based on the assessment score.
- In patients with both alcohol and benzodiazepine withdrawal, use the BWAS only (not the CIWA scale).
- Utilize the POSS assessment if concerned with sedation level and ETCO₂ monitoring with patients at risk for respiratory compromise.
- Give medications as ordered. If there is a contraindication based on patient safety, document the reason it was not given.

Contact SafetyMatters@hshs.org with questions or feedback