

Benzodiazepine Administration for Withdrawal from the “Unregulated Supply”: ED Huddle Education Tool

Case Study

A patient is in the triage waiting room– they have shared they are now experiencing mild symptoms of sweatiness, nausea, and tremors. They have been using unregulated drug supply for several months, their substance of choice is opioids, but know they have been exposed to benzodiazepine contamination.

1. What assessment tool would you use for benzodiazepine withdrawal?
2. What subjective history is key when a patient is withdrawing from unregulated drug supply?
3. How would you care for a patient who has been exposed to the unregulated benzodiazepine supply and is now presenting with withdrawal symptoms?

Answer

1. The preferred treatment while admitted to an acute care setting is a scheduled taper dosing regimen which indicates using the Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment (CIWA-Ar) protocol to assess symptoms.
2. The subjective history is key when a patient is withdrawing from the unregulated drug supply. Patients know their symptoms when they are experiencing withdrawal. As healthcare providers we need to actively learn how they are feeling as well as their history.

BENZODIAZEPINES • Anxiety • Tremor • Diaphoresis • Hypertension/tachycardia • Nausea/vomiting • Headache • Insomnia* • Psychosis* • Perceptual disturbances* + Auditory or visual hallucinations + Photo/phonophobia • Delirium* • Seizures* • Catatonia*

(Withdrawal from Benzodiazepines can be fatal if not treated in a timely manner)

3. The ED physician will order a benzo contamination withdrawal management order which consist of administering either diazepam or lorazepam based on the CIWA-Ar scoring. Nurses perform the CIWA-Ar scoring on the patient when they are in active benzodiazepine withdrawal. CIWA-Ar will be monitored Q1H until they score below 10 for 3 consecutive readings, then continue CIWA-Ar Q8H for 24 hours. Vitals are performed with each CIWA-Ar assessment.

Resources

SHOP

[BCCSU/VCH Hospital Care Substance Use Guidelines](#)



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Substance Use Consult Service

[24/7 Addiction Medicine Clinician Support Line](#)

Clinical Resources and Tools:

[Screening and Assessment Tools \(CIWA-Ar\)](#)

BCCSU Clinical Resources:

[Acute Clinical Care Guidance](#)