

Alcohol Withdrawal Management Case A: ED Huddle Education Tool

Case Study

A patient arrives in the emergency department reporting feeling severely unwell, experiencing vomiting, hand tremors and sweats.

A patient is moved into an acute care space by the triage nurse. You are at the bedside completing your ED Adult Assessment and notice the patient has hand tremors with arms at rest, beads of sweat on their forehead, is retching, and states, “feels like crap”.

- What assessment tool would you utilize for management of alcohol withdrawal?
- How would you interpret the patient’s withdrawal symptoms?
- What would be your next steps?

Answer

1. **Assessment Tools:**
- Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment of Alcohol Scale, Revised (CIWA- Ar): point of care assessment to monitor current withdrawal symptoms and determine treatment interventions
*may not be appropriate if there are communication barriers or decreased LOC

2. **Identify Withdrawal Symptoms:** this patient is experiencing moderate alcohol withdrawal

CIWA-Ar Interpretation

Score	Severity
0-9	Very mild withdrawal
10-15	Mild withdrawal
16-20	Moderate withdrawal
>20	Severe withdrawal

3. **Next Steps:**
- **Prioritize Safety of patient:** Refer to your site’s addiction consult team if available to call Access Central and determine need for supervised withdrawal management.
 - Consider need for pharmacotherapy (i.e. benzodiazepines, carbamazepine, gabapentin, or clonidine)
 - Monitor vital signs
 - **Provide Comfort:** Offer basic comforts like food and water if patient is interested. Utilize medications (including adjunct non-opioid medications) for symptom management to minimize discomfort and prevent patient-initiated discharge.

Note: Prevention of severe Alcohol Withdrawal is essential – these symptoms can result in death (DT, Seizures and Coma).

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Resources

SHOP BCCSU/VCH Hospital Care Substance Use Guidelines



Substance Use Consult Service

24/7 Addiction Medicine Clinician Support Line

Clinical Resources and Tools:

Screening and Assessment Tools

Alcohol Management Pharmacology

Withdrawal Management Pathway

BCCSU Clinical Resources:

Acute Clinical Care Guidance

Alcohol Use Disorder