

Alcohol Withdrawal Management Case B: ED Huddle Education Tool

Case Study

Patient is brought to the ED by ambulance, presenting with disorientation, hallucination, and an episode of seizure.

On arrival, he is alert and orientated x2, visibly anxious, pacing back and forth, stating, “My hands won’t stop shaking and I can’t think straight.” You are the nurse completing your ED Adult Assessment.

- 1. What assessment tool would you utilize for management of alcohol withdrawal?
- 2. How would you interpret the patient’s withdrawal symptoms?
- 3. 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 severe alcohol withdrawal

CIWA-Ar Interpretation

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

- 1. **Next Steps:**
 - **Prioritize Safety of patient:** Refer to your site’s addiction consult team if available or ED physician to determine if patient can be managed in ED or transfer to ICU as will require intensive treatment that should be given in a highly monitored setting.
 - Obtain orders for pharmacotherapy (i.e. benzodiazepines, carbamazepine, gabapentin, or clonidine)
 - Monitor vital signs q1 hours or more frequent basis until patient’s symptoms have stabilized
 - **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: Severe Alcohol Withdrawal can be fatal – 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