

Emergency Department Protocol for Patients with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS)

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) is a chronic condition characterized by severe burning pain, pathological changes in bone and skin, excessive sweating, tissue swelling and extreme sensitivity to touch. People afflicted with RSD/CRPS are extraordinarily sensitive to certain stimuli, such as touch, movement, and injections.

Patient Tips

1. Bring contact info and phone number of treating pain physician.
2. Bring your insurance card.
3. Bring a letter from your physician or pain specialist that states you are under care, a description of the pain condition and any other conditions you have been diagnosed with such as diabetes or a heart condition, and how it is being managed. Bring a list of medications and dosages you are taking.
4. Avoid having ice applied to the CRPS-affected limb.
5. Instruct all hospital staff to always ask before touching you!
6. Request a standing order for warm blankets.
7. Request family members to bring clean sheets and pillowcases. Hospital sheets are not soft and can irritate the skin.
8. If possible, place a sign above bed designating affected limb.
9. Be patient with the caregivers. Remember, you are a stranger to them. When you are in pain, this is a hard thing to ask, but becoming angry with your caregiver may alienate them, increase their suspicions of your motives, and lessen the chances that your treatment will be successful.

Procedures

1. Perform a phlebotomy on unaffected limb only.
2. Avoid needle stick injuries as far as possible – combine a blood test from different physicians into one procedure.
3. Ask that the thinnest needle possible be used.

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations has mandated the healthcare institutions that they accredit to assess and treat your pain. Pain is now to be assessed as the fifth vital sign. Patients have the right to demand pain control and to be pain free.

4. Use a topical numbing cream (EMLA® or Synera® patch)
5. Let them know that the veins are 'difficult'. CRPS patients have thin and friable.
6. Some individuals with CRPS are very sensitive to the pressure and temperature change of an IV flow and will greatly benefit from a slow infusion. Consider adding a small amount of EMLA over the IV site under the dressing and a strip of Lidoderm patch over the IV site to blunt the pain of the infusion.
7. Ask for the most experienced person to inset IV or blood draw.
8. Warm Alcohol or Betadine wipes with warm running water on outside of package before opening package (these wipes can be very cold to the patient).
9. If PICC site is available, see if blood can be obtained from PICC instead of using vena puncture technique.

Blood Pressure and Pulse Rate

1. Use cuff on unaffected limb only
2. Use thigh cuff if both upper extremities are affected

Transport

1. Ask what kind of help the patient needs when transferring to a stretcher or wheelchair (simply touching arms or legs may cause hyperalgesia)
2. Use extreme care over bumps, such as elevator doorways

Feeding

1. Be careful not to touch patient extremities with bedside

Patient Identification

1. Place limb alert bracelet on affected limb(s)
2. Place red dot sticker on patient chart.



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