

Pharmacologic Interventions for Pain Management



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KEYWORDS

- Acute pain • Pain management guidelines • Pain assessment tools
- Intravenous opioid analgesics • Nonopioid analgesics • Sedative analgesics
- Benzodiazepines • Case reports

KEY POINTS

- Acute pain is a global source of distress, especially in vulnerable and compromised critically ill patients.
- Pain management requires a holistic approach that is patient centered and includes the interprofessional team.
- Nurses must acquire self-efficacy in performing a comprehensive pain assessment in verbal and nonverbal patients for evaluation of their subjective and objective pain.
- The nurse must use clinical reasoning and critical thinking skills in the administration of pain medications in a critically ill patient to prevent serious side effects and adverse reactions.
- The nurse has an ethical and legal responsibility to provide safe, quality, and accountable pain management.

INTRODUCTION

Acute pain is a universal pervasive source of distress in critically ill patients that can be treated by pharmacologic therapy, such as opioid sedative analgesic medications.¹ Most patients in the critical care setting experience pain owing to underlying illness, surgery, injury, or care interventions. Pain management for this vulnerable and compromised population requires compassion and evidence-based best practices. Pain management requires a holistic approach incorporating patient-centered care

Disclosures: There are no disclosures or conflict of interest for any relationship with a commercial company that has a direct financial interest in subject matter or materials discussed in article or with a company making a competing product.

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Crit Care Nurs Clin N Am 29 (2017) 427–447

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cnc.2017.08.004>

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to include physical, psychological, and cultural perspectives into a collaborative treatment plan.^{1,2} The critical care nurse must acquire self-efficiency in conducting a comprehensive assessment for a verbal and sedated patient using evidence-based assessment tools, develop clinical reasoning skills for administering pain medications, and embrace ethical principles that serve as the foundation for their role in advocating for quality, safe, and accountable pain management for this vulnerable population.¹ This article presents a clinical toolkit for pain management that includes an ethical framework, professional guidelines, evidence-based pain assessment tools, pharmacologic medication therapy, and focused monitoring of side effects and adverse reactions. The focused population is critically ill hospitalized patients. Case reports demonstrate the application of critical thinking and clinical reasoning skills needed for pain management.

PAIN MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

The Surgeon General's 2016 *Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health* points out that the United States has a serious substance misuse problem and a national opioid crisis.³ According to the report:

- In 2015, 27.1 million people in were users of illicit drugs or misused prescription drugs.
- In 2014, 47,055 drug overdoses were reported.
- In 2014, 28,647 people died from some type of opioid overdose.
- Substance misuse costs more than \$400 billion annually owing to health issues, lost productivity owing to disability, and cost of crime.
- In 2007, costs associated with the use of nonprescription medications and illegal drugs were more than \$193 billion dollars
- Opioid misuse is a national public health crisis and related to overprescribing of opioid pain relievers.³
- A Prescription Drug Monitory Program emerged as a tool to reduce prescription drug abuse and diversion. The electronic data are used for enforcement, abuse prevention, education, and research. Currently, 49 states have legislation for the use of a Prescription Drug Monitory Program with 16 states monitoring schedules II through IV and 35 states monitoring II through V. The focus is drugs containing narcotics and tranquilizers.^{3,4}

Fears of drug addiction, myths regarding opioid pain management, and social media releases about the opioid crisis distorts attitudes about pain management. It is important that the pain management nurse and the collaborative team have evidence-based education about standards of practice, their scope of practice, legal rights of patients to be treated for their pain, and perform value clarification to embrace an ethical framework to guide their pain management plan of care.

Ethical Guidelines

In 2016, The American Nurses Association (ANA) and American Society for Pain Management Nursing partnered to publish a second edition for standards of practice guidelines for pain management. These prestigious nursing organizations view the *ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements* as the guiding ethical framework for pain management nurses.¹ Moral and ethical principles are integrated into their ethical pain management guidelines. It is important that the nurse clarify their own values and beliefs about pain management through value

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