

VIOLENCE REDUCTION IN THE EMERGENCY DEPT

Dangerous and violent patients present significant risks to emergency department staff and themselves. Calvary Mater Newcastle has almost twice the national average of presentations of violent and aggressive patients in the emergency department.

The Mater provides specialist services via a clinical toxicology unit, dedicated consultation liaison psychiatry and an inpatient drug and alcohol unit. In late 2008, a research project called DORM (**Droperidol OR Midazolam**) funded by NSW Health Drug and Alcohol Research Grants Program was started to test for the “best drug” for sedation. The positive results from the research project were immediate, causing some surprising changes surrounding the treatment of aggressive patients.

The DORM project has reduced the time for security staff to be in attendance, reduced the total amount of medication given to the patient and increased the safety of all staff by containing and controlling the violence more rapidly. The project has been extremely well received in the emergency department at Calvary Mater Newcastle with nursing and medical staff embracing this research opportunity.

The disturbance that out-of-control patients create in the emergency department is extremely distressing for staff due to the combination of verbal and personal abuse, the threat of physical violence and assault attempts. The fact that emergency department staff have to tolerate this daily, combined with already high levels of stress; leads to a high staff turnover, increased sick leave and low morale. The DORM project has improved the ability to rapidly control aggressive patients, making staff feel safer and exposing them to less risk.

The DORM project altered the historical practice of predominantly giving the medication via accessing a vein in the patient’s arm. Instead, the medication is injected directly into any large muscle (intramuscular). This intramuscular approach means that the medication is more rapidly administered without the need to access a vein which requires precision, time and large numbers of security staff to hold the patient down.

This method of delivery made a significant change to the effectiveness of the management of the situation. Rather than the nurses having to contend with the patient’s threatening behaviour while decisions were being made to contain the patient, staff are now pro-active, and can instigate immediate sedation and control the situation.

Previously, 90% of patients required additional sedation after their initial medication. In the DORM study however, this was reduced to only 50% of patients requiring more medication, exposing them to less injections and less close monitoring and observation which is time consuming for staff. This has also meant that half of the patients are controlled with one treatment, preventing ongoing disruption to the emergency department and allowing appropriate diagnosis and treatment.

An important finding from the DORM project was the extent to which alcohol binge drinking plays a major part in violence and aggression in the emergency department. The research showed that 60% of the patients (requiring both physical restraint and sedation) had primarily abused alcohol as the source of agitation and aggression.

Research is normally very difficult to undertake in the emergency department because of the nature of the department being very busy and at times chaotic. However, the DORM project was embraced by the staff because it had an immediate impact on a difficult problem they contend with daily. Questionnaires from security, nursing and medical staff expressed almost unanimous support for the change that the DORM project brought about.

The success of the DORM study has facilitated more rapid decision making and sedation of patients in our emergency department, compared to a previous haphazard approach using a variety of different drugs.

The mounting prevalence of violence in the community which spills directly into emergency departments underlies an urgent need for better and safer management of our staff and patients.

The success of the DORM project has proved that there is a way to combat these issues, creating a safer environment for our hard working and valuable emergency department staff.

A new day is *DORMing*...

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