

EYE CARE FOR THE MECHANICALLY VENTILATED INTENSIVE CARE PATIENT

Madonna Martin RN, BSN: mamartin@standordmed.org

Stanford Hospital and Clinics

Purpose:

Mechanically Ventilated (MV) intensive care patients are at risk for vision problems due to corneal infection and scarring. This project identified ICU nurses' knowledge about eye conditions and treatments; described eye care practices in mechanically ventilated (MV) ICU patients; and implemented an evidenced-based Eye Care Guideline.

Background:

MV patients may have incomplete eyelid closure, (lagophthalmos), decreased tear production, conjunctival redness, scleral edema (chemosis) and eye infection. Normal protective mechanisms of complete eyelid closure and an intact blink reflex are altered by sedation, muscle relaxants and the patient's underlying medical condition. Published eye care guidelines exist but are infrequent used.

Methods:

An eye care practice survey assessed ICU nurses' knowledge of eye problems and treatments in MV patients. In addition, 60 clinical observations of 20 MV patient's eye conditions were conducted in the ICU. The documentation of treatments for the 20 patients was also audited. Then, a nursing eye care guideline was developed and subsequently implemented.

Results:

Surveys were completed by 43% (75/180) of the ICU nursing staff. The results showed considerable variation in treatments used by nurses for similar eye conditions. Clinical Observations found 53% MV pts with eye conditions requiring treatment. Documented eye care ranged from 10% to 34%. The presence of an eye-care guideline at the bedside did not significantly change eye-care treatments that were documented.

Conclusions:

There is considerable variation in the eye-care provided to critically ill MV patients. Many ICU nurses lack knowledge of the evidence-based treatment recommended for eye-conditions. Changing eye-care practice in MV patients will require more intensive education and documentation systems that list treatment eye-care alternatives. Currently eye-care in MV patients is a neglected area of ICU nursing care practice.

Keywords: Mechanically Ventilated, Eye Care, Chemosis, Lagophthalmos and Conjunctival Redness

References

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