

The Emergent Management of Neuromuscular Disease in Intensive Care Unit (ICU)

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# Neuromuscular Disorders in ICU

- Admissions: Below 0.5% of ICU entries, creating unique challenges in management
- **Prognosis**: New diagnoses lead to longer ICU stays but often have better outcomes compared to other neurological disorders
- **Goal**: Aim to restore prior function
- Research Gap: Need more studies and expert collaboration for enhanced patient care

# **Anterior Horn Cells and Peripheral Nerves**

#### • Anterior Horn Cells (Acute Flaccid Myelitis):

- Enteroviruses: Poliomyelitis, Enterovirus D68, Enterovirus D71
- Arboviruses: West Nile Virus
- Paraneoplastic Motor Neuron Disease
- HIV

#### • Peripheral Neuropathy and/or Polyneuropathy:

- Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS)
- Lyme Disease
- Viral Infections: CMV, HIV, EBV, VZV
- Endocrine: Hypothyroidism
- Nutritional: Vitamin Deficiency (Thiamine, B12 or Nitrous Oxide Poisoning)
- Vasculitic Neuropathy: Rheumatoid Arthritis, Polyarteritis Nodosa
- Metabolic: Acute Intermittent Porphyria
- Toxins: Heavy Metals, Ethylene Glycol, Methanol, n-Hexane
- Critical Illness Polyneuropathy
- Malignancy: Leptomeningeal Malignancy

# Neuromuscular Junction Disorders and Myopathies

#### • NMJ (Neuromuscular Junction):

- Myasthenia Gravis
- Botulism
- Tetanus
- Tick Paralysis (Toxin interferes with Acetylcholine release)
- Organophosphate Poisoning, Overdose of Anticholinesterases
- Hypermagnesemia
- Paralytic Medications (Effects may be prolonged by renal failure, hepatic disease, hypermagnesemia, metabolic acidosis)

#### • Myopathy:

- Metabolic: Hypokalemia (Periodic Paralysis), Hypomagnesemia, Hypophosphatemia, Thyroid Disorders
- Mitochondrial Disease
- Inflammatory Myositis: Polymyositis, Dermatomyositis, Lupus, Scleroderma
- Infectious Myopathies: Influenza, Coxsackievirus, HIV, Legionella Pneumophila, Borrelia Burgdorferi
- Drug-induced Myopathy: Amiodarone, Cyclosporine, Hydroxychloroquine, Labetalol, Statins, Steroids, Zidovudine
- Hereditary Myopathies: Late-onset Pompe Disease (most likely to present to ICU with undiagnosed respiratory muscle weakness)
- Critical Illness Myopathy
- Mitochondrial Disease
- Rhabdomyolysis

# Key Points from Today's Presentation

- Guillain Barré syndrome (GBS) in the ICU
- Myasthenia gravis (MG) in the ICU
- Neuromuscular disease arising during treatment in the ICU (Critical illness polyneuropathy, Critical illness myopathy)
- Plasma exchange
- Intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG)

# Neuromuscular Emergencies



# Neck Flexion (Sternocleidomastoid Muscle) Weakness

- Manifestation: Can't lift head off pillow due to bilateral weakness
- Causes: Myasthenia Gravis, Myopathy, Guillain-Barre Syndrome
- **Correlation**: Neck weakness often mirrors respiratory muscle weakness
- Implication: Checking neck strength helps assess respiratory muscles, aiding patient care

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# Laboratory Evaluation

- Blood Tests:
- Electrolytes: Including Calcium, Magnesium, Phosphorus
- Creatine Kinase: Elevation may indicate myopathy
- HIV Screening: If applicable
- TSH: Thyroid-Stimulating Hormone assessment.
- Lumbar Puncture:
- CSF Normality:
  - Myopathy.
  - Neuromuscular Junction Disorders.
  - Peripheral Neuropathies (Though abnormalities may occur in neuropathies *involving nerve roots*, e.g., Guillain-Barre Syndrome, CMV, HIV).
- CSF Utility:
  - **Guillain-Barre Syndrome:** Classic *Albuminocytologic Dissociation* (elevated protein with normal cell count). Protein elevation may take time to develop.
  - Myelitis.
  - **Pleocytosis:** Often indicative of infections (e.g., Encephalitis, Enterovirus, West Nile Virus, HIV, CMV) or inflammatory conditions (e.g., Sarcoidosis). Mild pleocytosis of *5-50 cells* may be seen in Guillain-Barre Syndrome.

### Bedside Pulmonary Function Tests Forced Vital Capacity (FVC)

- **Definition**: FVC is the largest breath volume a patient can take
- **Reflection**: Covers Inspiratory Strength, Expiratory Strength, \*Lung Compliance
- Vs NIF: FVC measures *more than diaphragmatic strength,* potentially predicting respiratory failure better
- **Benefits**: More consistent, less discomfort than NIF; *better for tracking* respiratory progress over time



 In obesity, the weight should probably be the ideal body weight

For men: *IBW*=50*kg*+2.3*kg*×(height in inches–60) For women: *IBW*=45.5*kg*+2.3*kg*×(height in inches–60)

Rough Interpretation	cc/kg*
Normal	60 cc/kg
Concerningly low	<30 cc/kg
(Consider ICU monitoring)	
Very worrisome	<15 cc/kg
(At risk for intubation)	

# Negative Inspiratory Force (NIF)

- **Definition**: max negative pressure during inhalation
- Characteristics:
  - More uncomfortable and effort-reliant than FVC
- Use in Neuromuscular Disorders:
  - Limited for tracking progress in known cases (e.g., Myasthenia Gravis)
- Advantage:
  - Better at measuring muscle strength with other lung issues (e.g., Obstructive Lung Disease)
- Interpretation:
  - Values between 0 and -30 cm water show severe respiratory muscle weakness

# **Utilizing Pulmonary Function Tests**

#### • Initial Diagnosis:

Identifies neuromuscular weakness in unclear respiratory failure cases

#### • Evaluation & Triage:

Normal FVC with dyspnea suggests other issues (e.g., pulmonary embolism) Low admission FVC (e.g., <30 cc/kg) requires intensive respiratory monitoring

#### • Tracking Progress:

Intermittent FVC measurements assess therapy response

Thrice daily FVC measurement usually sufficient

Look for *consistent trend* over multiple measurements for significance

# Single Breath Count Test as a Surrogate for FVC

#### • Role:

Alternative to Forced Vital Capacity (FVC) in resource-limited settings

#### • Procedure:

Patient takes the deepest possible breath

Counts upwards from one, as high as possible, at a rate of about two counts per second (120 per minute)

Utilize a *metronome* to keep the beat

#### • Attempts:

Generally, two attempts are allowed

Higher count is considered the most accurate value

# Interpreting Single Breath Count Test

- Correlation:
  - Roughly correlates with Forced Vital Capacity (FVC)
- Count Interpretation:
  - Count >25 may indicate reasonably preserved FVC (over ~2 liters)
- Limitation:
  - Not validated in patients with concurrent respiratory issues (e.g., *pneumonia plus neuromuscular weakness*), unclear efficacy in such situations

# Blood Gas Monitoring in Acute Neuromuscular Weakness

- Worthless in patients without chronic respiratory dysfunction:
- -Normal respiratory drive should prevent hypercapnia until near exhaustion

-Hypercapnia is an extremely late finding unless medications like opioids are blunting respiratory drive

-Generally, not useful in most patients with acute neuromuscular weakness

# Utility in Chronic Hypercapnia

- Somewhat useful in patients with chronic hypercapnia (e.g., severe COPD):
- -Abnormal respiratory drive may lead to insidious hypercapnia without distress signs
- -Instead of respiratory extremis, patients may accumulate CO2 quietly, leading to CO2 narcosis
- -Useful in assessing altered mental status in such patients

# Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS)

# Treatment Indications in New-Onset Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS)

#### • When to Treat:

-Initiate treatment with clinical diagnosis of GBS, no need to await lumbar puncture or nerve conduction study confirmations

-Particularly crucial for critically ill or hospitalized patients with newonset GBS

# IVIG vs Plasma Exchange & Treatment-Related Fluctuations

#### • Treatment Selection:

- Both treatments *equally effective*; *combination not superior*
- IVIG preferred due to safety and ease: 0.4 grams/kg/day for five days
- Plasma exchange as an alternative if IVIG contraindicated

#### • Treatment-Related Fluctuations:

- Occur in up to 10% of patients; common practice is to retreat with original treatment
- More than three relapses or relapse after 8 weeks suggests Chronic Inflammatory Demyelinating Polyneuropathy (CIDP)

# Dysautonomia in Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS)

- More common in severe weakness cases, occurring in different GBS types: Demyelination or Axonal disease
- Patients may experience *alternating episodes* of sympathetic and parasympathetic hyperactivity, posing serious risks like bradyasystole
- Sustained hypertension is easier to manage compared to hemodynamic fluctuations
- Persistent hypertension can lead to target organ damage (e.g., Takotsubo cardiomyopathy or posterior reversible encephalopathy syndrome)

# Hemodynamic Management Principles

- Blood pressure swings often short-lived; avoid treatment unless necessary to prevent worsening hemodynamic fluctuations
- Avoid beta-blockers to reduce bradycardia risk
- For persistent/critical hypotension: Administer fluids for true hypovolemia, or use vasopressors at the lowest effective dose

# Addressing Persistent or Critical Hypertension

- Avoid treatment unless there's target-organ damage or severe ongoing hypertension
- 1st line: Address underlying causes (e.g., pain, agitation)
- 2nd line: Use *short-acting vasodilators* (nicardipine infusion), transitioning to *oral calcium-channel blockers* if stable.

# Managing Other Autonomic Issues

- Urinary retention/incontinence: Employ Foley catheter or frequent bladder scanning
- Gastroparesis: Use pro-motility agents or a post-pyloric feeding tube
- Intestinal ileus/colonic pseudo-obstruction: Implement aggressive bowel regimen to prevent complications like bowel perforation
- Extreme caution with neostigmine due to autonomic swings risk; pre-treat with glycopyrrolate to reduce bradycardia risk

# Noninvasive Respiratory Support

#### • Early Initiation:

Lack of high-quality evidence; theoretically, early noninvasive support may prevent respiratory exhaustion and intubation

#### • Utilization of BiPAP:

Beneficial in off-loading respiratory muscles at night, facilitating rest Ideal for nocturnal use; if patient is completely dependent, intubation is advisable

• Alternatives:

High-Flow Nasal Cannula (HFNC) for patients with respiratory weakness not requiring intubation

#### • Titration & Selection:

Largely based on patient tolerance; aimed at ensuring comfort while providing adequate support

#### • Key Takeaway:

Balance between *early support* and *timely intubation* is crucial to prevent further respiratory deterioration

# Pulmonary Function (Forced Vital Capacity)

- Provides a *piece of the overall clinical puzzle*
- Decision to intubate should never solely rely on respiratory mechanics
- Aberrantly low values may result from poor patient effort
- Beware of unvalidated "rules" for intubation based on specific cutoff values; they lack evidence basis

# Tracking Weakness of Other Muscle Groups

- Respiratory weakness often correlates with:
  - i) Neck flexion weakness (e.g., lifting head off the pillow relates to diaphragmatic weakness due to shared cervical nerve roots innervation)
  - ii) Facial or bulbar weakness
  - iii) Limb weakness (\*exception: myasthenia gravis)
- Progressive weakness across multiple muscle groups is concerning and warrants closer monitoring

# Clinical Evaluation & Decision to Intubate

- Numerous criteria for intubation exist, yet lack high-quality evidence backing
- Intubation decision is *clinical*, integrating multiple information sources:
  (1) Increased work of breathing signs (e.g., accessory muscle use, subjective dyspnea)
  (2) Difficulty in controlling secretions
  (3) Cough strength assessment
  (4) Overall muscle weakness progression
  - (5) Trends in forced vital capacity
- A comprehensive evaluation

### Intubation Procedure and Ventilation Management

- Intubation:
  - Be ready for *vagal episode* with push-dose epinephrine; avoid if possible
  - Check volume status; may need fluid resuscitation
  - *Skip Succinylcholine* due to potassium release risk from denervated muscles
- Ventilation:
  - Standard ICU protocols apply
  - No preference for SIMV or other modes in Guillain Barre Syndrome
- Weaning:
  - Follow usual steps; strength gain could allow extubation
  - Measure Forced Vital Capacity on ventilator during spontaneous breathing trials
  - *Diaphragm may recover before extremity muscles*; extubation viable with ongoing extremity weakness

# Myasthenic Crisis

# Definition of Myasthenic Crisis

- Definition Variability:
  - Some denote it as MG exacerbation needing intubation or noninvasive ventilation
  - Others refer to any MG exacerbation causing/threatening respiratory failure
- Usage in this Lecture:
  - Refers to respiratory dysfunction due to MG *necessitating ICU admission*
- Initial Manifestation:
  - Myasthenic crisis can be the first indication of MG in about 20% of patients
- Misconceptions:
  - Not all dyspnea in MG patients is myasthenic crisis; other cardiopulmonary diseases like pneumonia, heart failure, or PE should be considered

# **Cholinergic Crisis**

#### • Definition:

Caused by excessive doses of acetylcholinesterase inhibitors like pyridostigmine, leading to elevated acetylcholine levels acting as a depolarizing paralytic (akin to succinylcholine)

#### • Incidence:

*Rare in modern practice* due to standard pharmacologic dosing (<120 mg every 3 hours). More common historically with higher pyridostigmine doses. *Can occur with self-medication* exceeding recommended doses

• Clinical Features:

1.Escalated acetylcholinesterase inhibitor use: Particularly doses above 120 mg q3hr

2.Skeletal muscle fasciculation

**3.Autonomic symptoms from acetylcholine excess:** Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, salivation, lacrimation, diaphoresis. Miosis and bradycardia

• Management:

**1.**Cease acetylcholinesterase inhibitor administration

2.Supportive Therapy: Intubation if necessary

**3.Post-recovery:** Reintroduction of lower acetylcholinesterase inhibitor doses

# Triggers and Causes of Myasthenic Crisis

#### • General:

Myasthenic crisis may be the initial manifestation of myasthenia in ~20% of patients

#### • Common Triggers:

#### Infection (~40% of crises, notably pneumonia)

#### **Medications:**

**Exacerbating medications** 

Mismanagement of myasthenia gravis meds (e.g., pyridostigmine)

Alteration in immunosuppressive or steroid regimen

#### **Electrolyte Abnormalities (Ca/Phos/Mg)**

# Thyroid Disease (both hypo- and hyperthyroidism); associated with autoimmune thyroid disease

Surgical Procedures/Trauma

**Pregnancy and Delivery** 

• Undetermined Cause: in about one-third of patients

# Non-Invasive Respiratory Support (HFNC or BiPAP)

- Initiate early in mild respiratory distress to prevent exhaustion
- Failures occur when initiated in extremis
- HFNC: Safe, reduces work of breathing, improves ventilatory efficiency
- BiPAP: First-line for mild-moderate dyspnea, helps in oropharyngeal bulbar weakness by providing pneumatic stent
- Requires ICU supervision for effectiveness monitoring (e.g., minute ventilation and tidal volume on BiPAP)

# Bedside Respiratory Assessment for Intubation Decision

- Not solely based on pulmonary function tests or ABG/VBG trends
- Assess:
  - Respiratory rate, work of breathing, distress signs
  - Cough efficacy, secretion clearance, airway protection
  - Neck flexion weakness trends
  - FVC values and trends
- Concerns: Worsening hypoxemia, atelectasis, aspiration, alternative overlooked diagnosis
- Chest radiograph for lobar collapse or aspiration signs

# **Intubation Procedure**

- Use non-depolarizing paralytic (e.g., rocuronium, ~50% dose reduction)
- *Avoid succinylcholine* due to reduced acetylcholine receptor density

# Extubation & Tracheostomy

- Extubation within 1-2 weeks, ~20% require tracheostomy
- Aggressive MG management (e.g., plasma exchange) to enhance muscle strength for early extubation
- Standard extubation procedure, with planned BiPAP support to reduce reintubation risk, followed by nocturnal BiPAP until full recovery
- Risk factors for extubation failure: Age >50 Pre-intubation serum bicarbonate >30 mEq/L Vital capacity <25 ml/kg in first week Pneumonia MuSK antibody positivity

# Management of Steroids in Myasthenic Crisis

#### • Existing Steroid Users:

- Maintain initial dosage.
- Post substantial improvement with plasmapheresis/IVIG, consider dose escalation if initial dose was low
- New Steroid Users:
  - Option 1: Delay steroid initiation until post-plasmapheresis/IVIG and notable improvement
  - **Option 2**: Initiate with low dose (e.g., 20 mg prednisone), gradually up-titrate. *Low initial dose may prevent MG deterioration*

# Plasma Exchange and IVIG in Myasthenic Crisis

• Plasma Exchange - First-line for Severe Exacerbation

Directly extracts anti-acetylcholine receptor antibody, usually improving symptoms within *a few days* 

Advantage: *Rapid response*, beneficial for severe cases at risk of or already intubated, reducing ventilator-associated complications

Especially effective for *MuSK+* patients

Improvement often observed by 2nd or 3rd session

Faster action compared to IVIG, crucial in severe exacerbation

#### • Intravenous Immunoglobulin (IVIG) - Suitable for Less Severe Exacerbations

Takes 2-3 weeks to manifest improvements, offering possibly more sustained efficacy Dosage: 2 grams/kg, typically spread over 5 days Alternative when PLEX is unavailable or contraindicated Neuromuscular disease arising during treatment in the ICU

(Critical illness polyneuropathy, Critical illness myopathy)

There are 15 more slides.....

# Critical Illness Polyneuropathy

#### • Definition:

- length-dependent, symmetric, *axonal sensorimotor* polyneuropathy
- It can develop rapidly among critically ill patients, potentially within three days

#### Clinical Manifestations:

- Generalized weakness varying from moderate paresis with hyporeflexia to complete quadriparesis and areflexia
- Symmetric, distal-to-proximal distribution of weakness
- Respiratory function often affected, typically presenting as failure to wean from mechanical ventilation
- Usually, cranial nerves are spared
- Sensory impairment may be subclinical, though observed in about half of the patients
- Initially preserved but eventually reduced or absent deep tendon reflexes; a distinguishing factor from critical illness myopathy

# **Critical Illness Polyneuropathy**

- Diagnostic Measures:
  - Nerve Conduction Studies:
    - Axonal polyneuropathy evidenced by reduced amplitudes or absence of compound muscle action potentials (CMAPs) and sensory nerve action potentials (SNAPs)
    - Expect *normal latencies and conduction velocities*, indicating absence of a demyelinating process
  - Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF):
    - Typically, CSF findings are normal in CIP
- Management:
  - Predominantly *supportive*, aimed at alleviating symptoms and ensuring patient comfort

# Critical Illness Myopathy

#### • Occurrence:

- May manifest either *solely or alongside* Critical Illness Polyneuropathy
- Associated with extended therapeutic paralysis, high-dose steroids, severe pulmonary disease, and sepsis

#### • Clinical Symptoms:

- Proximal diffuse muscle weakness, occasionally *extending to facial muscles* (*excluding extraocular muscles*)
- Preserved sensation
- Relatively intact reflexes
- Potential muscle wasting and challenges in weaning from mechanical ventilation

# Critical Illness Myopathy

- Lab Tests:
  - *Creatinine kinase* generally remains *normal or mildly elevated*. Significantly elevated levels may indicate other conditions like rhabdomyolysis or inflammatory myopathy
- Electromyography:
  - Compound Motor Action Potentials (CMAPs) exhibit reduced amplitude and prolonged duration
  - Needle examination unveils fibrillation potentials and small, myopathic motor units
- Treatment:
  - Primarily *supportive*, including avoidance of known risk factors
  - Compared to Critical Illness Polyneuropathy, Critical Illness Myopathy presents a *more favorable prognosis* with patients often achieving complete recovery



# Plasma exchange & Intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG)

There are 10 more slides.....

# **Basics of Plasma Exchange**

- Process:
  - Insert a large-bore hemodialysis catheter
  - Exchange patient's plasma with albumin or fresh frozen plasma (usually albumin; fresh frozen plasma for patients with coagulopathy)
- Purpose:
  - Remove a wide range of proteins from blood
  - For example, to quickly get rid of auto-antibodies
- Note:
  - Plasma exchange can also take away *endogenous anti-inflammatory cytokines* from the body

# **Contraindications for Plasma Exchange**

- Unable to get large-bore vascular access
- Severe hemodynamic instability (including severe dysautonomia)
- Serious coagulopathy (especially low levels of fibrinogen)
- Untreatable low calcium levels
- ACE inhibitors could raise the risk of severe swelling (angioedema)
- Pregnancy (relative contraindication): Hormonal changes from plasmapheresis could trigger early labor

# **Potential Complications**

- Catheter-Related:
  - Pneumothorax, infection, hematoma
  - Catheter usually stays in for around 10 days, raising infection risk
- Medication Removal:
  - Some drugs get removed as they are either *highly bound to proteins* or are *proteins*.
  - Examples: Certain blood thinners, IVIG, rituximab, natalizumab, some antiseizure meds
- Other Complications:
  - Low calcium due to anticoagulant used in the outside-the-body circuit
  - Transfusion reaction (if using fresh frozen plasma)
  - Coagulopathy (removal of clotting factors)
  - Weakened immune system (goal is to remove immunoglobulins but this could affect response to infections)
  - Severe swelling (angioedema) as exchange can *boost bradykinin levels*

# Basics of IVIG (Intravenous Immunoglobulin)

- Composition:
  - Made from pooled immunoglobulin from blood donors
  - Contains a variety of antibodies reacting to common antigens (e.g., infections)
- Mechanism:
  - Unclear how IVIG helps suppress autoimmune disorders
  - Might change immunoglobulin metabolism or compete for binding to Fcreceptors on immune cells

# **Contraindications for IVIG Administration**

- Refractory volume overload (due to large volume of fluid in IVIG)
- Renal failure
- Known allergic reaction to IgA
- IgA deficiency:
  - Higher risk of severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis)
  - Ideally, measure IgA levels before IVIG, but in emergencies, IVIG is given without this check

# Potential Complications and Dosage

- Complications:
  - Drug-induced aseptic meningitis (DIAM)
  - Acute kidney injury, volume overload
  - Infusion-related side effects: fatigue, fever, nausea, headache, flushing (up to 24 hours)
  - Allergic reactions (especially with IgA deficiency), thrombotic complications, antibodymediated cytopenias
- Dosage:
  - Typical dose: 0.4 grams/kg/day for five days.
  - Dosage based on ideal body weight in case of morbid obesity

# Plasma Exchange vs. IVIG

#### • General Controversy:

- Choice between Plasma Exchange & IVIG varies across centers
- Decision influenced by local norms & logistics

#### • Cost & Availability:

- IVIG: widely available but expensive
- Plasma Exchange: limited to large centers, sometimes unavailable during nights/weekends, may be cost-effective

#### • Disease-Specific Considerations:

- Guillain-Barre Syndrome: Equal efficacy
- Myasthenic Crisis:
  - Plasma exchange preferred for faster action
  - More effective in MuSK+ patients

#### Individual Patient Considerations:

• Previous slides list contraindications/complications

# Pitfalls in GBS Management in ICU

Autonomic Swings: Avoid overaggressive treatment

**Forced Vital Capacity**: Guard against excessive focus and measurement

**Negative Inspiratory Force**: Judicious use

**GBS Diagnosis**: Consider in ICU patients with post-viral weakness

**Respiratory Failure**: Differentiate causes, not just neuromuscular failure

Pitfalls in Myasthenia Gravis Management in ICU **Differential Diagnosis in Dyspnea**: Do not solely attribute dyspnea to myasthenic crisis. Consider other causes like pneumonia or heart failure

**Pulmonary Mechanics Monitoring**: Avoid overfrequent measurements, which can be distressing for patients

**Intubation Criteria**: Refrain from intubating solely based on arbitrary pulmonary mechanic thresholds; lack of data supporting this practice

**Medication Caution**: When introducing new medications, be aware of contraindicated drugs for myasthenia gravis patients



# Thanks for your attention