# Adult Alcohol Withdrawal Syndrome (AWS) Practice Guideline

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# Objectives

- *Define alcohol withdrawal syndrome*
- *Explain the AWS Typology method of treatment*
- *Explain the use of the Adult AWS Practice Guideline*
- *State purpose of the Adult AWS Orders*

# Why do we need a guideline?

- Chronic alcohol abuse leads to changes in the brain
- Up to 25% of population may be affected
- Sudden cessation of alcohol can produce symptoms with 6-12 hours
- 5-10% of these patients develop seizures
- 5% develop delirium tremens

# Question 1

- Symptoms of AWS can begin 6 – 12 hours after sudden cessation of alcohol.

  - True
  - False

# Purpose of AWS Guideline

- When used in conjunction with Adult Alcohol Withdrawal Syndrome (AWS) Orders will:
  - Provide a symptom-triggered approach to treatment
  - Provide a means for ordering both PRN lorazepam and haloperidol

# Symptom Categories

- Type A: CNS Excitation
- Type B: Adrenergic hyperactivity
- Type C: Delirium

- Defined in AWS Guidelines on the AWS Type Indicator and charted on Flowsheet

# Type A Symptoms: CNS Excitation

- Anxiety or nervousness (including mild hand tremor)
- Restlessness
- Bothered by loud sounds or bright lights

- **Treatment:** PRN lorazepam

# Type B Symptoms: Adrenergic hyperactivity

- **Nausea or vomiting**
- **Tremors**
- **Diaphoresis**
- **SBP >160, DBP >100**
- **HR>100**
- **Irregular pulse**
- **If symptoms uncontrolled can be deadly**

- Treatment: clonidine or beta blockers as ordered (not included on Adult AWS order set)

# Type C Symptoms: Delirium

- Inappropriate responses to questions
- Hallucinations
- Disoriented to time, place, person
- Does not know how long they have been hospitalized

- Treatment: PRN haloperidol

# Delirium Tremens (DTs)

- Life-threatening emergency
- Usually 3-7 days after last drink
- All 3 types of symptoms manifest together

# Question 2

The AWS Type Indicator:

A. Is a blood test for heavy alcohol use
B. Is an instrument used to assess AWS symptoms
C. Categorizes AWS symptoms into Type A, B, and C clusters
D. Both B and C

# Goals of Treatment

- Early identification and treatment of AWS
- Decreased use of physical restraints and sitters
- Prevention of withdrawal seizures
- Increase in referrals to alcohol treatment programs

# Key Points

- The Guideline is <u>not</u> a Protocol. *Physician order is required.*
- Patient placed on Guideline by physician order if:
  - Cage score $\geq$ 2 (assessed by LIP)
  - Risk factors for AWS
- Decisions to medicate:
  - Symptom-triggered approach
  - Based on assessment using the AWS Type Indicator

# AWS Orders include:

- **ECG** to evaluate QTc (if not completed previously)
- **Labs:** %CDT is a marker of heavy alcohol use. If <2.6 suggests low risk for AWS, use of guideline not indicated
- **Social work:** consult is required

# AWS Orders include:

- **Fall Precautions** must be initiated
- **Symptom-triggered** dosing for benzodiazepine and haloperidol
- **Scheduled** benzodiazepine dosing as ordered by physician for some patients

# Guideline Use

- Confirm AWS orders
- Assess symptoms
- Document symptoms on flowsheet
- Total scores on flowsheet
- Medicate as indicated
- Reassess as needed to evaluate effectiveness of medication
- Collaborate with physician to determine when standing doses of medications are indicated

# Resources

- The four-page guideline must be ordered through print shop and are kept on the nursing unit (order information: UP NO. 500463 Rev. 7/04)
- More Information at: http://www.musc.edu/aws/
- AWS Orders available in Clinician Order Forms at http://www.musc.edu/cce/ORDFRMS/pdf/awssi1.pdf

# Question 3

All of the following are true about the MUSC Adult Alcohol Withdrawal Syndrome (AWS) Practice Guideline <u>except</u>:

A. It makes treatment recommendations for CNS excitation, adrenergic hyperactivity, and delirium
B. Treatment interventions are based on AWS Type Indicator assessments
C. It can be used for patients on ventilators who cannot be evaluated for symptoms with the AWS Type Indicator
D. It is approved for use in all adult acute hospital units

# Question 4

The Adult Alcohol Withdrawal Syndrome Orders must be completely filled out and signed by a physician before the Adult AWS Practice Guideline can be initiated.

- True
- False