

PROTOCOL FOR: Increased Intracranial Pressure (ICP): Care of the Patient

**SUPPORTIVE DATA:** Abnormal increased pressure in the intracranial cavity that results from an increased volume of brain tissue, vascular tissue or cerebrospinal fluid.

Oncologic emergencies display symptoms that progress along a continuum and the goal is to identify and intervene early before a true emergent situation develops.

**DESIRED  
PATIENT OUTCOMES:** Patients are assessed for signs and symptoms of oncologic emergencies.

Interventions are implemented promptly before a true emergent situation develops.

**CLINICAL  
ASSESSMENT  
AND CARE:**

1. Assess Risk Factors: Patients at risk are those with:
  - a. Diagnosis of lung, breast, testicular cancers; cancers with probability of brain metastasis, melanoma
  - b. Diagnosis of primary brain or spinal cord tumor
  - c. Diagnosis of leukemia or neuroblastoma

Assess for signs and symptoms of ICP, including:

a. Early signs:

- Headache (may be aggravated/initiated by Valsalva, coughing, bending)
- Visual disturbances (blurred vision, diminished vision)
- Anorexia, N/V

b. Late signs:

- Decreased LOC and inability to concentrate, hemiplegia, hemiparesis, pupil changes, seizures
- Personality changes, memory problems
- Tachypnea, slow-shallow respirations, Cheyne-Stokes respirations
- Bradycardia, widening pulse pressure

Notify physician for:

- a. Widening pulse pressure, decrease in pulse rate, changes in respirations
- b. Changes in pupil reactions, mental status or level consciousness

**MANAGEMENT** includes:

- a. Surgery and/or Radiation Therapy
- b. Pharmacologic agents
  - Corticosteroids
  - Antineoplastic agents
  - Diuretics

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- Anticonvulsants
  - Stool softener, antiemetics, analgesics, anti-anxiety
- c. Monitor for signs and symptoms of worsening increased intracranial pressure and notify physician as appropriate.
- Widening pulse pressure, decreased in pulse rate, changes in respirations
  - Changes in pupil reactions, mental status or level of consciousness
  - Seizure activity
- d. Intervene to maximize safety for patient
- Maintain airway
  - Bedrest, seizure/aspiration precautions
  - Side rails up/Fall precautions
  - Provide calm environment by minimizing external stimulation (noise, dim lights)

APPROVAL: Nursing Standards Committee

EFFECTIVE DATE: 6/01

REVISION DATES: 3/02