

The Medical Management of Acute Agitation

What comes after “Look out!”

APM Resident Education Curriculum

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Objectives

- Identify the principles of the “cycle of violence.”
- Describe the broad differential diagnosis behind the symptoms of agitation and aggression.
- Apply nonpharmacologic and pharmacologic approaches to management of the agitated patient in the general medical setting.

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The Case

- A 47 year-old male with a history of substance abuse and bipolar disorder along with morbid obesity, DM and COPD presents to the ED at 0200 after calling 911 and reporting chest pain.
- Initially cooperative in the ED, but the staff indicate that he has been mumbling to himself and staring at them suspiciously. They gave him some lorazepam to “calm” him.
- Since arrival to the floor to r/o MI he has been becoming increasingly irritable, confrontational and restless. Eventually he starts to become uncooperative with care and then verbally and physically threatening to the staff.
- They call a psychiatry consult for “HELP!!!!”

Definitions

- **Agitation**
 - Excessive motor or verbal activity
- **Aggression**
 - Actual noxious behavior that can be verbal, physical against objects, or physical against people
- **Violence**
 - Denotes physical aggression by people against other people

Citrome L, Volavka J. 2002

Component Behaviors

- Aggressive behaviors
 - Physical
 - Fighting
 - Throwing things
 - Grabbing objects
 - Destroying items
 - Verbal
 - Cursing
 - Screaming
- Nonaggressive behaviors
 - Restlessness
 - Wandering
 - Inappropriate disrobing
 - Repetitive questioning

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