

Delirium and Cognitive Impairment in the ED

Learning Objectives:

Differentiate Delirium, Dementia and Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD)

- Describe and distinguish the clinical features and subtypes of delirium and dementia.
- Understand their prevalence and relevance in the emergency setting.
- Recognize the potential for delirium to be superimposed on dementia.

Assess Cognitive Function in Older Adults

- Understand the utility of ED validated screening tools to assess and document delirium.
- Develop strategies to obtain an accurate history and recognize specific care needs for older adults with cognitive impairment.

Develop a Comprehensive Diagnostic Approach

- Formulate an age-appropriate differential diagnosis for new cognitive or behavioral changes.
- Initiate an appropriate diagnostic work-up to identify underlying causes of delirium.
- Recognize and address common reversible contributors to delirium and agitation (e.g. dehydration, urinary retention, constipation, pain, lack of hearing and visual aids, environmental factors, etc).

Manage Delirium and Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD)

- Recognize evidence-based non-pharmacologic strategies as first-line management for hyperactive and hypoactive delirium, and BPSD.
- Develop strategies to safely manage agitation and behavioral disturbances while minimizing the use of physical and chemical restraints.
- Understand appropriate indications, risks, and alternatives for pharmacologic management.
- Understand indications for pharmacologic treatment, and if utilizing what are preferred medications, appropriate doses, and dosing intervals to minimize adverse medication effects.

Implement Delirium Prevention Strategies

- Identify environmental and clinical interventions that reduce the risk of delirium in the ED.

Understand Patient Safety, Ethical and Legal Considerations

- Develop an approach to the assessment of decision-making capacity in older adults with cognitive impairment.
- Understand the use and indications of legal instruments such as:
 - Mental Health Act Forms for involuntary admission
 - Provincial Health Care Consent Acts
 - Advance care directives
 - Substitute decision makers, powers of attorney, and involvement of public guardians.

