



Identify Alcohol Withdrawal Symptoms Early and Ease Patients' Care

Management of patients who present at the hospital for alcohol abuse and detoxification can be complex and unpredictable. But, when patients present with a medical condition, concomitant alcohol withdrawal [may be misdiagnosed](#). Such misdiagnosis can cause a delay in treatment at best and harm to the patient at worst.

Signs and symptoms of alcohol withdrawal syndrome typically manifest within eight hours of the patient's last drink, peak between one and two days, and last for five days. They include anxiety, headache, nausea, lack of appetite, hypertension, disorientation, and irritability. And, if the patient is not treated appropriately, they can worsen.

Therefore, time is of the essence when managing alcohol withdrawal—and successful management begins with prompt diagnosis, which means staff need to know when to consider alcohol withdrawal syndrome in the differential diagnosis.

Ideally, clear protocols can help healthcare providers identify patients who may be experiencing alcohol withdrawal syndrome upon admission. Such early assessment and detection allows providers to get patients the right treatment sooner. However, staff members need to know the organization's assessment protocols, how to use them, and how to act upon their findings appropriately.

ECRI Institute PSO has seen events in which alcohol withdrawal management protocols were not carried out effectively or were hindered by complications relating to use of health information technology to enact the protocol.

Empowering Staff and Reviewing Protocols for Efficacy

Education and awareness campaigns can aid healthcare providers in determining when the [revised Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment of Alcohol Scale](#) (CIWA-Ar) assessment should be performed.

[One study](#) demonstrated that the electronic health record system could be used to identify patients at highest risk for alcohol withdrawal syndrome; however, events reviewed by ECRI Institute PSO demonstrated that use of health information technology carries risks of its own during alcohol withdrawal management, due to medication doses not recorded, order sets not able to be located, and other system-based concerns. So, any HIT-based solutions should be thoroughly reviewed for potential risks before implementation.

The organization should review its protocols to ensure that the potential for alcohol withdrawal syndrome is recognized when a patient presents either to the emergency department or for planned admission with an unknown diagnosis—and that healthcare providers are ready to begin interventions as needed.

Health Systems and Addiction: The Use and Misuse of Legal Substances

Join ECRI Institute for this free, public service conference on November 16-17, 2016.

National thought leaders will bring evidence and insights on the scientific understanding of addiction, innovations in the prevention of misuse of legal substances, and initiatives to treat and manage addiction. For details and registration, visit www.ecri.org/2016conf.

Patient Safety Center

World-class research, guidance, and tools made available to the public.

ECRI Institute is committed to patient safety, as it is the key element of our mission. The [Patient Safety Center](#) contains publicly available free resources to help all healthcare providers improve the quality and safety of the care they provide.

ECRI Institute is Hiring!

Are you seeking employment with an organization that focuses on improving healthcare and values and respects its staff? We are actively looking for patient safety and risk management experts for several positions. [Learn more.](#)

Sign Up for Our Other Newsletters

We offer free newsletters on important patient safety, risk, and health technology management issues. [Sign up today.](#)

[About Our PSO](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Careers](#)



This email was sent by:

ECRI Institute
5200 Butler Pike
Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462-1298
USA
Telephone: +1 (610) 825-6000



ECRI Institute Offices: [United States](#), [Europe](#), [Asia Pacific](#), [Middle East](#)

Privacy: We respect your need for privacy. ECRI Institute does not sell your information to third parties for their use. Any information you provide is stored in a secure environment designed to prevent misuse.

Copyright 2016 ECRI Institute. All Rights Reserved.