Management of Delirium in the Elderly Patient on the AMU

Delirium is characterised as a disturbance of consciousness cognitive function or perception which has an acute onset and fluctuating course.

It can be subdivided in to hypoactive, hyperactive and mixed depended on the presentation.

Symptoms can vary from withdrawn, quiet and sleepy to aggressive, hyperactive and restless.

Risk factors for the development of Delirium
- Age > 65
- Unfamiliar environment
- Pre-existing dementia or psychiatric illness
- Sensory disturbance
- Pain
- Hypoxia
- Severe physical co-morbidities
- Hip fractures
- Nicotine withdrawal

Causes of Delirium
- Infection
- Renal failure
- Liver failure
- Heart failure
- Hypoglycaemia
- Dehydration
- Constipation
- Medication and polypharmacy
- Acute drug withdrawal
- Intra-cranial pathology
- Vitamin deficiency e.g. B12/folate
- Hormone imbalances e.g. TFTs

Treatment of Delirium
- **CORRECT THE UNDERLYING CAUSE**
- Supportive nursing
- De-escalation techniques
- Short course of anti-psychotics , review daily

1st line
ORAL Haloperidol 500 micrograms 8 hourly
2nd line - Severely aggressive patients
IM Haloperidol 500 micrograms,
titrate dose in increments of 500 micrograms hourly to a maximum of 2mg.

• Avoid the use of anti-psychotics in patients with Parkinsons/Lewy body dementia – consider Quetiapine 25mg OD or Lorazepam 0.5mg orally however…
• Try to avoid the use of Benzodiazepines unless alcohol withdrawal where possible
• Only use IM medication in severely agitated patients refusing oral medication.

Investigation of Delirium
- Baseline observations
- Detailed Examination
- Bloods : FBC, U+E, LFT, Ca, TFTs, B12, folate, Glucose
- ECG
- CXR
- Urinalysis
- Functional assessment
- Collateral history relatives/carers
- MMSE if Delirium suspected
- CT brain/Lumbar puncture **if clinically indicated**

See the NHST clinical guidance for managing delerium in adults for more details, references & assessment tools

L. Broadbent, N Irvine & D Lowdon

November 2012 due for revision November 2013