

When a Burn is not Equal to Just Applying Aloe Vera

A Phototherapy Burn Management Protocol

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Background

We have initiated the development of a Burn Management Protocol for Phototherapy patients. This was a team effort to identify and implement a process in the management of post phototherapy burns. The motivation for this project is to assist phototherapy nurses to assess their patients more as UV therapy is a highly nurse-led procedure.

Aim

The aim of the guideline is to ensure timely management of severe symptomatic erythema and also to establish/improve current guidelines based on the identified cause of burn. The aim is to review and manage patients with severe burn within 24 hours to avoid adverse events such as post inflammatory hyperpigmentation, Koebner response and potential litigation.

Key processes / Method

The protocol was developed along with improving the Phototherapy Guideline to identify and cover relevant clinical findings and processes that may contribute to a burn among phototherapy patients. We undertook several departmental policy meetings to arrive at a best practice guideline.

Results / Patient Outcome

The following are the relevant assessments when a patient presents with a burn or reports an adverse event following treatment:

1. Is there an accidental overdose?
2. What are the signs and symptoms?
3. Did the patient start a new medication?
4. Is the patient using a photosensitising medication?
5. Any incidental sun exposure before or after the last dose?
6. Did the patient change an item of clothing used inside the machine?

It is also important to take photos of the affected areas for photodocumentation. The dermatologist will need to be notified urgently and an urgent appointment made for appropriate management. Depending on your local policy, an Incident Report should be completed and document all the relevant findings in your progress notes.

From a nursing point of view, educate patients to moisturise the 'sunburnt' area with a non-perfumed moisturiser. Remember that these patients already have compromised skin from their actual skin conditions (e.g. eczema and psoriasis)¹ so avoid any plant-based or animal-based products to prevent further irritation.

While post phototherapy burns are not very common due to strict procedures and guidelines in treatment, adverse events occur. The protocol helps nursing staff identify the event and escalate care in a timely manner following the set steps to undertake when patients present with a burn following their phototherapy treatment. This means patients receive appropriate care as soon as the problem is identified.

Conclusion

The Phototherapy Burn Management Protocol is an effective way in assessing patients and implementing management for a skin burn, improving the phototherapy services provided to patients. So the next time your patients present with a 'sun burn', look further.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Monisha Gupta and Katrina Smith for their contributions in this guideline.