

# NATIONAL EMERGENCY NURSES ASSOCIATION



Standards and Practices	Emergency Nursing Core Competencies
Number of Pages	8
Approval Date	April 2014
Past Revision Dates	November 2007, November 2009
Next Revision Date	November 2016

Emergency nursing is a specialty within the nursing profession. Emergency nurses must possess a broad body of knowledge and skills to care for various complex health care issues from non-urgent to life threatening; to a variety of age groups, involving various disease processes, body systems and specific populations.

Emergency nursing education and orientation should be based on NENA's Core Competencies as well as standardized education programs such as; Basic Cardiac Life Support (BCLS), Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS), Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS), Trauma Nursing Core Course (TNCC), Emergency Nursing Pediatric Course (ENPC), Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (CTAS), and Geriatric Emergency Nursing Education (GENE).

A Competency is an expected level of performance that integrates knowledge, skills, abilities, and judgement. An individual who demonstrates competence is performing successfully at an expected level (Emergency Nurses Association, 2011).

The expected level of performance for an emergency nurse is fluid in its progression from novice to expert (Benner, 1982), based on the nurse's level of learning and experience.

## Core Competencies

### Airway

#### **ASSESSMENT, INTERVENTION AND MONITORING IS A COMPETENCY REQUIRED BY ALL EMERGENCY NURSES**

- Knowledge of airway anatomy and emergencies specific to the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations
- Assessment of airway to determine airway patency
- Insertion of nasopharyngeal and oropharyngeal airways
- Suctioning of the airway
- Utilization of non-invasive positioning to clear and open the airway, including head tilt chin lift or jaw thrust
- Perform and/or assist with insertion and maintenance of supraglottic airways
- Perform and/or assist with intubation, ensure correct placement of ET Tube and monitoring of the intubated patient including EtCO<sub>2</sub> monitoring
- Assist with emergency cricothyrotomy and/or emergency tracheostomy

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## Breathing

### **ASSESSMENT, INTERVENTION AND MONITORING OF RESPIRATORY STATUS IS A COMPETENCY REQUIRED BY ALL EMERGENCY NURSES**

- Knowledge of respiratory anatomy and emergencies specific to the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations (e.g. asthma, croup, bronchiolitis, epiglottitis, COPD, pulmonary edema, pulmonary embolus)
- Assessment of effective versus ineffective ventilations
- Chest auscultation and identification of normal and abnormal breath sounds
- Knowing when to administer oxygen, the amount and by the appropriate means
- Using a bag-valve mask device
- Perform and/or assist with arterial/venous/capillary blood sampling
- Interpretation of blood gas results
- Assist with setting up, insertion of chest tubes, and monitoring chest tube drainage
- Interpretation and monitoring of oxygen saturation
- Collection of peak flow measurements
- Identification of life threatening respiratory conditions and perform and/or assist with appropriate interventions
- Care of CPAP and ventilated patient in the emergency department

## Circulation

### **ASSESSMENT, INTERVENTION AND MONITORING OF CIRCULATORY STATUS IS A COMPETENCY REQUIRED BY ALL EMERGENCY NURSES**

- Recognition and treatment of shock syndromes for the adult/pediatric/geriatric patient: cardiogenic, hypovolemic, distributive, and obstructive
- Initiates early sepsis screening and interventions
- Interpretation of vital signs
- Assessment of effective circulation in the pediatric patient (central and peripheral pulses, capillary refill, skin color, temperature and moisture)
- Auscultation and identification of normal and abnormal heart sounds
- Perform and maintain IV access
- Perform and/or assist with insertion and maintenance of intraosseous access
- Understanding/utilizing principles of rapid fluid administration/devices
- Understands/utilizes principles of blood transfusion
- Understanding/utilizing principles of massive transfusion
- Administering all types of fluid replacement (i.e. crystalloids, plasma expanders, blood products)
- Interpretation of lab values
- Assist with insertion of central venous and arterial lines
- Accessing and drawing blood from central lines and intravenous access devices

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- Maintenance of a normothermic environment (i.e. warming/cooling blankets, warmed fluids, etc.)

## Cardiovascular

### **INITIAL CARDIOVASCULAR ASSESSMENT, INTERVENTION AND MONITORING IS A COMPETENCY REQUIRED BY ALL EMERGENCY NURSES**

- Assessment and knowledge of interventions for Acute Coronary Syndromes
- Basic cardiac monitoring and interpretation
- Perform and interpret 12 and 15/16 lead ECG's
- Knowledge of Fibrinolytic protocols
- Knowledge of Targeted Temperature Management protocols
- Perform and/or assist with defibrillation, cardioversion and external pacing
- Assist with pericardiocentesis
- Knowledge and interventions related to pharmacology and protocols for the cardiovascular system (i.e. antiarrhythmics, antihypertensives, vasopressors, inotropes)

## Neurological

### **INITIAL NEUROLOGICAL ASSESSMENT, INTERVENTION AND MONITORING IS A COMPETENCY REQUIRED BY ALL EMERGENCY NURSES**

- Knowledge of neurological emergencies specific to the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations
- Assessment of level of consciousness
- Interpretation of neurological signs and symptoms in context with history
- Assessment of Glasgow Coma Scale
- Assessment and knowledge of appropriate interventions for headaches
- Assessment and knowledge of appropriate interventions for seizures
- Assessment and knowledge of interventions for head injury (e.g. increased intracranial pressure, and administration of hyperosmotics such as Mannitol)
- Assessment and knowledge of interventions for TIA and stroke (e.g. National Institutes of Health Stroke Scale, The 8 D's of Stroke Care)
- Knowledge of Fibrinolytic protocols
- Assessment and knowledge of interventions for spinal cord/vertebral injury
- Perform and/or assist with application of cervical collars
- Perform and/or assist with spinal stabilization/immobilization
- Non-pharmacological pain management therapies
- Evaluation of pain utilizing an appropriate pain scale (e.g. numerical 1-10, FACES, FLACC)
- Pharmacological management of pain
- Assessment and knowledge of interventions for organic brain syndrome (dementia and Alzheimer's disease)
- Assessment and knowledge of interventions for acute confusional state (delirium)

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## Physical Assessment and Intervention

### PHYSICAL ASSESSMENT IS A COMPETENCY REQUIRED BY ALL EMERGENCY NURSES

#### Maxillofacial, Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat

- Knowledge of EENT emergencies specific to the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations (e.g. Otitis, peritonsillar abscess, foreign body, sensory changes, angioedema, epistaxis)
- Measure visual acuity
- Perform eye irrigation (e.g. Morgan Lens insertion and care)
- Assess and assist in management of epistaxis (e.g. nasal packing and balloon catheters)
- Assess and assist in management of post tonsillectomy hemorrhage
- Assist with removal of foreign body
- Assist with care of displaced teeth and/or replantation
- Assist with incision and drainage of peritonsillar abscess

#### Abdomen

- Knowledge of abdominal emergencies specific to the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations (e.g. obstructed bowel, GI bleed, pancreatitis, cholecystitis, appendicitis, pyloric stenosis, intussusception, constipation, diarrhea)
- Inspection, auscultation, and palpation of abdomen
- Insertion of nasogastric or orogastric tubes
- Assist with diagnostic peritoneal lavage
- Assessment and care of ostomy
- Rectal and esophageal temperature monitoring
- Rectal tube insertion
- Monitor percutaneous feeding tube

#### Genitourinary

- Knowledge of genitourinary emergencies for males/females specific to the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations (e.g. renal colic, urinary tract infections, pyelonephritis, hematuria, urinary retention, acute/chronic renal failure)
- Insertion/application and care of urinary/condom catheters
- Knowledge of catheter associated UTI (CAUTI)
- Assist with insertion of suprapubic catheters
- Assist with insertion of and monitoring or continuous bladder irrigation
- Perform and interpret bladder scans
- Perform and interpret urine dipstick tests
- Perform and interpret urine pregnancy tests
- Assist with collection of urethral swabs
- Obtain urine culture samples
- Monitor fluid balance (In and Out)

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## Reproductive Female

- Knowledge of reproductive emergencies for females in the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations (e.g. ectopic pregnancy, ovarian cyst, foreign bodies)
- Inspection, auscultation and palpation of the abdomen
- Auscultate fetal heart tones
- Recognize signs of fetal distress
- Estimate PV blood loss
- Knowledge of hospital protocol for sexual violence
- Assist with pelvic exam, collection of swabs and/or forensic evidence collection
- Knowledge of sexually transmitted illnesses
- Knowledge of abortion (spontaneous, threatened, therapeutic, septic, missed)
- Knowledge of perinatal loss including care of the patient and family
- Assessment and knowledge of obstetrical emergencies (abruption placentae, placenta previa, ruptured uterus)
- Assist with emergency childbirth (i.e. unexpected delivery, precipitous, meconium stained fluid, breech presentation, cord prolapse, APGAR, care of the newborn)

## Reproductive Male

- Knowledge of reproductive emergencies for males in the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations (e.g. testicular torsion, penile/scrotal pain, priapism, prostatitis)
- Knowledge of hospital protocol for sexual violence
- Knowledge of sexually transmitted illnesses

## Musculoskeletal/Integumentary

- Knowledge of various musculoskeletal and integumentary emergencies specific to the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations (e.g. fractures, dislocations, amputations, arthritis, osteomyelitis, rashes, cellulitis, necrotizing fasciitis, skin disorders)
- Neurovascular assessment of extremities
- Assessment of the seven P's (pain, pallor, polar, paresthesia, pulses, pressure, and paralysis)
- Assessment and intervention for compartment syndrome
- Assessment and intervention of various pain management strategies
- Splinting (R.I.C.E)
- Assist with reduction and/or immobilization of fractures and dislocations
- Preservation of amputated parts
- Performing wound care of the acute and chronic wound
- Assisting with wound closure (e.g. suturing, staples, skin glue)
- Apply topical anesthetic
- Assist with local anesthetic
- Ring removal

## Environmental

- Knowledge of impact of environmental emergencies specific to the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations

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- Assessment and interventions of burns
- Assessment and interventions of heat stroke/heat exhaustion
- Assessment and interventions of near drowning
- Assessment and interventions of hypothermia and frostbite
- Assessment and interventions of high altitude and decompression illness
- Knowledge and assessment of bites and stings (e.g. human, animal, insect, snakes, jellyfish)
- Assessment and interventions of bio-terrorism threats/attacks
- Knowledge and implementation of staff/patient safety
- Knowledge of disaster planning and policies

## Toxicology

- Knowledge of various toxicological emergencies specific to the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations
- Access to poison control information
- Knowledge of specific antidote administration
- Administration of charcoal
- Assist with gastric lavage
- Assist with whole bowel irrigation
- Knowledge of common poisonings and methods to prevent absorption and enhance elimination (e.g. sodium bicarbonate, naloxone, N-acetylcysteine, flumazenil, specific antidotes)
- Recognition of substance intoxication and abuse
- Knowledge of protocols and treatment for substance abuse and withdrawal

## Psychiatry

- Knowledge of psychiatric emergencies specific to the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations
- Selection of appropriate interventions to manage alterations in mental/behavioural health and ensure patient and staff safety
- Knowledge of protocols, guidelines, and laws pertaining to patients with mental/behavioural health illnesses
- Recognition of escalating behaviour
- Recognition of delirium, dementia, and depression in the geriatric population
- Knowledge and interventions for mood and personality disorders, anxiety and stress disorders, eating disorders, schizophrenia
- Knowledge of suicidal risk assessment

## Psychosocial

- Provides effective and timely communication to the patient and significant others
- Ensures environment that promotes privacy and support
- Knowledge of crisis intervention as it relates to the patient, family and significant others
- Provision of reassurance, acceptance and encouragement during times of stress
- Recognition of signs of abuse in the pediatric/elder/vulnerable patient
- Recognition and knowledge of intimate partner violence
- Knowledge of cultural awareness and sensitivity

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## **Immunology/Hematology/Endocrinology**

- Knowledge of immunologic/hematologic/endocrine emergencies specific to the adult/pediatric/geriatric populations
- Assessment and interventions for hyperglycemic emergencies (Diabetic Ketoacidosis, Hyperglycemic Hyperosmolar Syndrome)
- Assessment and interventions for hypoglycemia
- Assessment and interventions for thyroid emergencies (e.g. thyroid storm)
- Assessment and interventions for adrenal gland emergencies
- Assessment and interventions for oncologic emergencies
- Assessment and interventions for blood dyscrasias
- Assessment and interventions for the immunocompromised patient (e.g. HIV, neutropenia)

## **Medications**

- Knowledge of pharmacology and medications
- Administers medication safely according to agency policy
- Knowledge of medication reconciliation

## **Discharge Planning**

- Provides teaching to patient and/or significant others on an ongoing basis
- Provides explanations for medications, treatments, self-care, follow up and/or referrals to outside resources
- Provides additional discharge instructions via departmental handouts or community prepared documents when available
- Consults and coordinates care with specialists, allied health, and additional support services (e.g. Physiotherapy, social work, occupational therapy, home care, outpatient clinics)

## **Professional Practice/Legal/Ethical Issues**

The Emergency Nurse will be knowledgeable of hospital policies and procedures and provincial or national laws related to:

- Sexual violence
- Interpersonal violence
- Patient restraints
- Blood alcohol collection
- Abuse of the pediatric, geriatric, or vulnerable patient
- Criminal assault
- Gunshot or stab wound reporting
- Advanced directives
- Organ and Tissue donation
- Family presence during resuscitation
- Medical/legal cases
- Informed consent

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- Unidentified patients
- Workplace violence prevention
- Infection Control
- Emergency preparedness and planning including pandemic and disaster planning

## REFERENCES

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