

Interview with Project Health Radio (August 2, 2012)

Project Health Radio is a non-profit, Chicago-based national health communications organization specializing in producing and distributing information on health and well being. Their talk shows are nationally syndicated programs broadcast on 106 stations across the country, including WKQX (Q101, Chicago, WAAF (Boston), WWLE (New York), KALI (Los Angeles), KSJX (San Francisco/San Jose).

Tom Shaer (Project Health Radio):

But right now we are going to talk about pain management and there is an interesting approach being taken by an organization the Physician-Patient Alliance for Health & Safety (PPAHS) and it involves patient-controlled analgesia. How do you manage pain with the patient controlling that management. PCA patient-controlled analgesia. A lot of acronyms here and we'll try and sort it out for you. And to help us do that joining us on the program right now is Michael Wong, a health and safety advocate and founder of the Physician-Patient Alliance for Health & Safety. Hi, Mr Wong, good to have you on the show.

Michael Wong (Physician-Patient Alliance for Health & Safety):

Good to be on the show with you, Tom.

Tom:

So, what is the issue with PCA patient-controlled analgesia?

Michael:

First of all we have to understand that PCA is used to manage pain and for patients to manage their pain most often after surgery. Many studies have shown the benefits to using PCA including better pain management, better utilization of nursing resources, increased patient satisfaction, and improved pulmonary function. But, as well, your listeners should really know the dangers associated with the pump. In reports filed with the FDA between 2005 and 2009, there were more than 56,000 adverse events and 700 patient deaths linked to PCA pumps.

Tom:

PCA pumps, now, this is where the pain medication is pumped in what way? The patient does it manually or it's time released?

Michael:

It is done through IV and it is only done on prescription by the physician. And, the patient, even if sounds like the patient is controlling it, the patient can only give themselves as much of the pain medication as the physician prescribed. And, as the systems are supposed to work, no overdose or that kind of thing is supposed to occur. However, there are some errors in terms of programming the pump that have been observed. But as well, respiratory depression can even if there are no errors that are occurring with the pump.

Tom:

So, it could affect one's breathing adversely even if the pump is used properly?

Michael:

That is correct. What you have described is respiratory depression. The opioids will basically slow down your breathing and will make it more shallower, and that is on the onset of respiratory depression.

Tom:

So, is your organization, the Physician-Patient Alliance for Health & Safety, are you trying to eliminate the use of PCA pumps?

Michael:

No, by all means, no. We are not trying to eliminate it. As I mentioned earlier, there are certainly great benefits to using PCA. What we're trying to alert physicians and patients, families and hospitals and caregivers is to some of the dangers associated with that. And just to ensure that there are patient safety measures that are taken to ensure their safe use. Certainly, if I was in a hospital and would want a PCA if I was in great pain, but I'd also want to make sure that I'm monitored correctly, that I'm assessed correctly that I'm using it safely.

Tom,

What type of education is needed to be done for people who have a choice and do they have a choice? Is there another way to administer the pain medication? A better way?

Michael:

It could be administered by a nurse by bolus, but IV PCA is shown in many studies to have great benefits, not only for patient management, controlling pain, but as well hospital staff and their time. So, there are great benefits to doing that.

Tom:

There might be better ways to use the existing PCA pumps. You are certainly not out to revolutionize the way patient controlled analgesia is administered. We are talking to Michael Wong here on Project Health Radio. Mr Wong is a health and safety advocate and founder of the Physician-Patient Alliance for Health & Safety. And we're talking about patient controlled analgesia for pain medication. What do families and patients need to know about safety, and the safety checklist that your organization has put together.

Michael:

For families and patients, there are sort of ... if I were a patient or had a family member that's in the hospital, there are four questions that you need to keep in mind: How does this pump work? And, in terms of danger signs, what are the danger signs that something has happening to the patient that the pump is going to tell us? The second question is the patient being, are the patient's oxygen levels being

monitored? Is the patient being monitored for adequacy of ventilation with capnography? Has the patient's weight, medical conditions, and other medications been taken into account before the PCA is hooked to the patient?

Tom:

Well, there are a lot of things to consider and do appreciate your taking the time to come on and talk about this with us here on Project Health Radio, Mr Wong, because I don't really hear a lot about this. I hear about pain medication, but the whole concept of PCA, patient controlling the dosage of the analgesia is not talked about a lot. Is there anything else being done? Are there other organizations involved in research in this for alternatives perhaps?

Michael:

The organizations that seem to be involved are actually the patients and their families, and the families get involved because unfortunately their loved one has suffered an adverse event or death while using PCA pumps. And that seems to be, those seem to be the organizations that are really pushing for safety measures on it. But, as well, as I mentioned earlier, the FDA has received a number of reports on PCA adverse events and deaths. And ISMP (the Institute for Safe Medication Practices) and the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority has collected data on it and are very concerned. I have interviewed individuals from both organizations and that interview can be found on the PPAHS site. And both organizations have expressed, very much expressed concern over possible PCS dangers.

Tom:

PCA patient-controlled analgesia. The most common system is the PCA pump and we've been talking about with Michael Wong, a health and safety advocate and the founder of the PPAHS (the Physician-Patient Alliance for Health & Safety). Again their website is ppahs.org. Thanks very much, Mr Wong, for joining us on Project Health Radio

Michael:

You're welcome, Tom. Glad to be here.