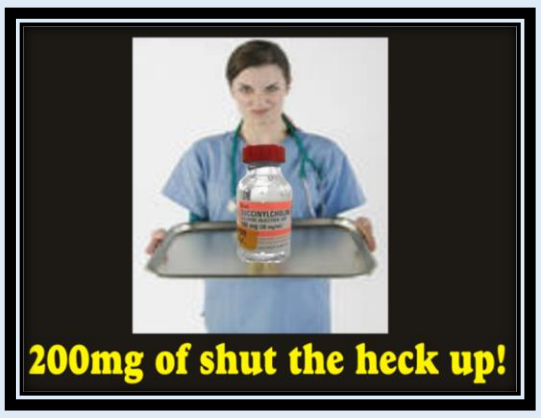
Peds Pearls

I've Got Three Tickets to Paralyze!

Paralytics and Pain

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Paralytics and Pain...

Paralytics (neuromuscular blockers) begin with "P," and what do they do? They paralyze, and that's all they do. What do they do for pain? NOTHING! What do they do for sedation? NOTHING! That means you are awake, paralyzed, and able to see, hear, and most importantly, feel everything that is being done to you. You just can't do anything about it.

Paralytics fall into one of two categories, making matters simple for a change. Those two categories are: a) Succinylcholine, commonly called “Sux,” and b) everything else. Included in the “everything else” category are: Norcuron (vecuronium), often called “Vec;” rocuronium, or simply “Roc;” Pavulon (pancuronium); and Nimbex (cisatracurium), sometimes called “Cis.”

We ♥ Sux

In EMS and the Emergency Department, we love “Sux” because it starts working quickly and doesn’t last a long time; usually less than 10 minutes. Paralytics in the “everything else” category bring on paralysis not quite as quickly and generally last considerably longer, typically from 15 to 60 (or more) minutes.

Planning the Paralytic Party!

There are, of course, pros and cons to each type of medication, and airway experts have been known to debate for hours and hours as to which drug is best for what situation. Regardless of the results of those debates, what is crucial to remember is not only how long these drugs last, but *what they do* (they paralyze), and, critically important, *what they don't do* (anything for pain and/or sedation).

So, if we need to administer a paralytic agent, it shouldn’t be given alone. Invite a couple of friends to join the party. Bring along something for sedation, like Versed (midazolam), and something for pain, like fentanyl. Just as the duration of action of the paralytic is a key consideration, it’s just as important to understand and plan for how long the effects of the sedation and pain meds will last. With Versed and fentanyl, you can generally figure on them lasting 20 to 30 minutes. That being said, since our emphasis is on pediatric considerations, we should keep in mind that our youngest patients seem to react differently. When it comes to the effects of many medications, it’s not unheard of to find that drugs don't seem to last nearly as long in kids as what our drug books would suggest.

We are told that Pavulon generally lasts 60 (or more) minutes; considerably longer than Versed and fentanyl. This means that if you pushed all three drugs at the same time, the child would be asleep and hopefully pain free for 20 to 30 minutes. But, as the sedation and analgesia wears off, our patient would then start to awaken and feel things (like pain) while still paralyzed. And this could last for 30 or more minutes until the neuromuscular blocker wears off. Not a happy time!

Bottom Line... Plan Accordingly!

If you are going to chemically paralyze a sick kid, that’s fine. But it’s fine ONLY if you have given them something for the pain, ONLY if you have given them something for sedation, and ONLY if whatever you gave for pain and sedation lasts as least as long, if not longer, than whatever you gave to paralyze them.

Or to paraphrase the famous 80's song by Eddie Money.

“*I've got three tickets to paralyze...*”





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Contact us to have Scott DeBoer or one of our other pediatric experts present at your next conference.

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