Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA)

Guidelines on Monitoring During Anaesthesia

Background Paper

PURPOSE

Clinical observation and assessment by a vigilant anaesthetist is essential for safe patient care during anaesthesia. Monitoring is an integral part of observation and recording contributing to the management of anaesthesia and outcomes. In the perioperative period clinical changes can occur rapidly and at times unexpectedly, and consequently it is fundamental that such changes are detected early to facilitate management. In general the term ‘monitoring’ is used to imply the use of electronic monitoring equipment; however other equipment (e.g. sphygmomanometer) may meet the standard in some circumstances.

With advances in technology and monitoring equipment it is timely to review standards of monitoring.

PS18 was last reviewed in 2008 and was republished in 2013. In line with A01 Policy for the Development and Review of Professional Documents, the title of PS18 has been changed from “Recommendations” to “Guidelines”. “Guidelines” offer advice on clinical and non-clinical aspects of the practice of anaesthesia and perioperative medicine, reflecting expert consensus and supported by other evidence when available.

SCOPE

PS18 is intended to apply wherever anaesthesia is administered and includes general anaesthesia, sedation, and major regional analgesia. While general anaesthesia and major regional analgesia is performed by anaesthetists, conscious sedation is administered by a wide group of practitioners. The guidelines are primarily intended for anaesthetists; however, any practitioner responsible for monitoring sedated patients should follow them.

The purpose of this guideline is to inform practitioners of the standards and to guide them in the use of monitoring aimed at achieving optimal clinical management and optimising patient safety and quality care.

BACKGROUND

There have been significant changes over time in the ability to observe and record physiological variables, and this ability has led to advances in anaesthesia techniques. With the advances in anaesthesia and the development of more potent and titratable agents comes the benefit of producing very rapid onset of effects, but also the disadvantage of rapid onset of other (unwanted) effects. Increasing patient comorbidities and sometimes complex procedural requirements adds to the complexity of care.
Historically, rapid changes in physiology necessitated the anaesthetist to be in close physical contact to the patient, with constant observation, palpation of peripheral pulses, continual auscultation with precordial stethoscopes, and visualisation of pupils, amongst other things. Increasing sophistication of equipment has allowed the anaesthetist to be removed from direct physical contact and has provided the opportunity for improved quantification of variables, as well as enabling alarm variables to be set, and recording of data. This in turn contributes to improved quality care and outcomes.

Vigilance and situational awareness cannot be replaced by monitoring equipment and the purpose of the equipment is to confirm changes in clinical status, but also to signal changes earlier. Consequently, monitoring is essential to management of anaesthesia with specific regard to optimising outcomes.

The accompanying guidelines recommend that circulation, ventilation and oxygenation are monitored as a minimum and that other monitors should be added as required.

**ISSUES**

*Pulse Oximetry*

While monitoring of oxygen and use of pulse oximetry is regarded as mandatory for all cases the monitoring of other variables is strongly encouraged. Where, for any reason, other monitors are not used, they must be readily available should they become required.

*Electrocardiography*

It is recognised that ideally every patient should be monitored using an ECG and it is strongly encouraged; however, it is also acknowledged that there are situations where ECG monitoring may not be feasible. The omission of ECG monitoring in these circumstance must be clinically justifiable.

*Capnography*

Discussions as to whether capnography should be mandated for all cases indicated that there remains strong support for all cases in which general anaesthesia is administered. For sedation techniques that do not require airway instrumentation, capnography is optional and should be determined by the patient’s clinical requirement and depth of sedation, and not the availability (or lack thereof) of suitable equipment. The transition between general anaesthesia and sedation and their definitions can be found in **PS09 Guidelines on Sedation and/or Analgesia for Diagnostic and Interventional Medical, Dental or Surgical Procedures**.

*Blood pressure*

Blood pressure monitoring is considered essential for the vast majority of cases. It is recognised however that in some situations this may be inappropriate (e.g. prior to induction of anaesthesia in an extremely agitated patient), or impractical (emergency management of a life threatening airway condition, extremely brief paediatric procedure). In all such cases blood pressure monitoring should be initiated if and when circumstances permit.

*Neuromuscular blockade monitoring (NMB)*

This is an emerging area of standardisation due to the awareness of the risk of residual curarisation. Guidelines such as the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain & Ireland
(AAGBI) Recommendations for standards of monitoring during anaesthesia and recovery (2015) provide excellent background and have moved towards mandating assessment of NMB; however the AAGBI Appendix does not consider suxamethonium and emergency cases if a NMB monitor is not available. There is also some internal inconsistency within the Appendix to the guideline. Quantitative assessment should be undertaken because tactile assessment cannot sensitively identify if a train of four twitch ratio is > 0.9.

Other monitors

The emergence of new monitoring modalities requires that their role and validity be carefully assessed prior to firm recommendations being made. Cerebral oximetry (using near infrared spectroscopy) is one example where, although it is receiving widespread attention in a number of clinical applications, it is not yet clear that it will reliably alert to cerebral hypoperfusion in certain circumstances (e.g. beach chair or sitting positions). As further data emerges the role of these monitors will be clarified.

Presence of the anaesthetist

An anaesthetist must be constantly present whilst providing anaesthesia during the procedure. It is recognised however, that on occasions, exceptional circumstances may arise requiring the anaesthetist to leave theatre or procedure room for brief periods. Such absences should occur only if they are unavoidable, in which case a handover to another anaesthetist in accordance with PS53 Statement on the Handover Responsibilities of the Anaesthetist is required. If another anaesthetist is not available and the situation is within the scope of another suitably skilled practitioner, then delegation of observation, including recording of observations must be to a practitioner who is judged to be competent for the task and capable of responding to any significant perturbation either directly or by summoning assistance. The term ‘practitioner’ is defined by the regulatory authorities in Australia and New Zealand and in the context of this document the term refers to an individual who is practising within their scope of practice as determined by the health care institution in which the case is being undertaken.

SUMMARY

Monitoring is an integral part of observation and recording contributing to the management of anaesthesia and outcomes. PS18 was revised based on the above advice from the document development group. The goal of this revised document is to support uniform standards for the use of monitoring in conjunction with clinical observation.

RELATED ANZCA DOCUMENTS

A01 Policy for the Development and Review of Professional Documents  
PS02 Statement on Credentialing and Defining the Scope of Clinical Practice in Anaesthesia  
PS03 Guidelines for the Management of Major Regional Analgesia  
PS06 Recommendations on the Recording of an Episode of Anaesthesia Care  
PS07 Recommendations for the Pre-Anaesthesia Consultation
PS09 Guidelines on Sedation and/or Analgesia for Diagnostic and Interventional Medical, Dental or Surgical Procedures

PS53 Statement on the Handover Responsibilities of the Anaesthetist

PS55 Recommendations on Minimum Facilities for Safe Administration of Anaesthesia in Operating Suites and other Anaesthetising Locations

ANZCA Handbook for Training and Accreditation

ANZCA Handbook for Training and Accreditation in the Affiliated Training Regions

FURTHER READING


DOCUMENT DEVELOPMENT

ANZCA Safety and Quality Committee acted as the document development group for the 2015 review, led by:

Associate Professor David Scott, FANZCA, Councilor

Dr Peter Roessler, FANZCA, Director of Professional Affairs (Professional Documents)

In addition, the following were consulted:

ANZCA regional and national committees

Faculty of Pain Medicine Board, national and regional committees

ANZCA Safety and Quality Committee

ANZCA Trainee Committee

ANZCA Special Interest Groups
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Promulgated: 2015

Date of current document: December 2015

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