



Guideline on monitoring during anaesthesia

Background Paper

1. Purpose

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 such as a 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.

2. 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.

3. Background

There have been significant changes over time in the ability to observe and record, either manually or by computerised methods, physiological parameters, 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 parameters, as well as enabling alarm parameters 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.

4. Issues

4.1 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.

4.2 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 circumstances must be clinically justifiable.

4.3 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*.

4.4 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 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.

4.5 Neuromuscular blockade monitoring

This is an emerging area of standardisation due to the awareness of the risk of residual curarisation. Guidelines such as the AAGBI (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. A comprehensive review of non-depolarising neuromuscular blockade and reversal in 2017

concludes that “Objective measurement (a train-of-four ratio greater than 0.90) is the only method to determine appropriate timing of tracheal extubation and ensure normal muscle function and patient safety”¹. Therefore, quantitative monitoring is recommended to assess depth of blockade prior to reversal and assessment of adequacy of reversal. Quantitative assessment is essential since tactile assessment is subjective and cannot detect fade at a TOF ratio of greater than 0.4. Only quantitative monitors can assess adequacy of reversal. Best available evidence suggests that a train-of four ratio of >0.9 should be achieved prior to extubation following the use of non-depolarising neuromuscular blockade.

Feedback received during the pilot phase revealed that interpretations of the available evidence varied with strong proponents advocating for mandatory use of quantitative neuromuscular function monitors while others were more moderate. Both benefits and cost implications were considered. The recommendations in the accompanying guidelines acknowledge this debate and fall short of mandating their use. However, quantitative monitoring of neuromuscular functions is recommended with a view to improving the management of neuromuscular blockade.

4.6 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 an example of such 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.

Temperature monitoring has historically been for the purpose of managing hypothermia. However, with the emergence of forced air warming and contact warming devices the potential for hyperthermia and its consequences has been recognised. As a result, whenever active warming devices are being used it is recommended that temperature be monitored to avoid hyperthermia. Specification of use for extended cases was avoided due to the many other factors that may be relevant other than purely time alone. Each case needs to be assessed on its merits and risks.

4.7 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.

5. 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

References

1. Brull, SJ and Kopman, AF Current Status of Neuromuscular Reversal and Monitoring, Challenges and Opportunities. *Anesthesiology*. 2017; 126:00–00.

Further reading

Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain & Ireland (AAGBI). Recommendations for standards of monitoring during anaesthesia and recovery (2015). From: <http://www.aagbi.org/sites/default/files/Standards%20of%20monitoring%2020150812.pdf> Accessed 13 September 2015.

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The Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland. Recommendations for standards of monitoring during anaesthesia and recovery. London: The Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland, 2007. From: <http://www.aagbi.org/sites/default/files/standardsofmonitoring07.pdf> Accessed 12 October 2015.

Document development

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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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