Change in Mental Status
Hepatic Encephalopathy (HE)

Treatment & IDT Process
Mrs. Johnson in room 113 just had a fall with no injuries. Sorry to wake you at 4:30am but we needed to report it.

Your 82 year old patient had a change in mental status all day. Do you want a U/A and anything else?
Causes of Altered Mental Status in Adults

- Fever or infection
- Poisoning or overdose
- Blood sugar/endocrine problems
- Head injury
- Inadequate oxygenation or ventilation
- Conditions leading to decreased blood flow or oxygen to the brain
- Cardiac or diabetic emergencies
- Shock
- Stroke
- Behavioral Illness
- Seizures
Chronic Liver Disease (CLD) affects over 5.5 million patients in the USA\textsuperscript{1}, of who more than 600,000 have cirrhosis.\textsuperscript{2}
Hepatic Encephalopathy (HE)

HE is most commonly a syndrome observed in patients with cirrhosis.

Subtle signs of it are observed in nearly 70% of these patients. Given its extremely high prevalence, HE should be a condition that LTC providers are readily able to diagnosis and treat.\(^3\)

However, due to its episodic nature, slow progression and symptoms which overlap those of other diseases, clinicians often miss this diagnosis.

Top cause of 30-day hospital readmissions\(^4\)

LTC providers need to be both knowledgeable and vigilant regarding its prevalence, pathophysiology, diagnosis and treatment.

3. Elwir 2017
Diagnosis and Factors

Diagnosis of hepatic encephalopathy
• Elevated free arterial serum ammonia level. BUT NOT ALWAYS…
• EEG: shows non-specific high amplitude low frequency waves and tri-phasic waves.
• CT scan and MRI of the brain may be necessary in ruling out intracranial lesions. In acute encephalopathy brain edema may be seen.

Common precipitating factors:
Dehydration, ascites, changes in diet and alcohol use

Others include: Renal failure, GIT bleeding, infection, constipation, increased dietary protein intake. Opiates, benzodiazepines, anti-depressants and anti-psychotics may also worsen encephalopathy. Hypokalemia and alkalosis (due to vomiting or excessive use of K-losing diuretics) increase solubility of NH3 thus increase its passage across the blood brain barrier.

Differential diagnosis of encephalopathy (other causes of coma):
Intracranial lesions (intracranial he, tumor, abscess), infections (meningitis, encephalitis), metabolic encephalopathy (hypoglycemia, uremia, electrolyte imbalance), alcoholic encephalopathy, post-seizure encephalopathy.
Treatments
Mechanism of Action of Lactulose for OHE

- A non-absorbable disaccharide
- It produces osmosis of water — Diarrhea⁵,⁶
- It reduces pH of colonic content & thereby converts freely diffusible NH₄⁺ into ammonium ions (NH₄⁺), which cannot be absorbed and are therefore excreted⁵,⁶
- Lactulose reaches the colon unsplit. It is then converted by bacteria to organic acids and an acid stool results. This may also affect the ionization of ammonia in the colon and reduce its absorption⁵,⁶
- The current AASLD/EASL guideline (2014) recommends rifaximin as an add-on to lactulose for prevention of recurrent episodes of HE after the second episode.⁷

⁵ Reena. ⁶ Davidson’s ⁷ AASLD·EASL 2014
Rifaximin

Rifaximin is a minimally absorbed oral antimicrobial agent that is concentrated in the gastrointestinal tract, has broad-spectrum activity against gram+ and gram- aerobic and anaerobic enteric bacteria, and has a low risk of inducing bacterial resistance.\(^8\)

In randomized studies, Rifaximin was more effective than non-absorbable disaccharides and had efficacy that was equivalent to or greater than that of other antibiotics used in the treatment of acute HE.\(^9\)

Note that rifaximin is not a treatment for OHE. It should rather be positioned as a secondary prophylaxis strategy for use with lactulose to prevent recurrence of HE and related hospitalizations.\(^{10}\)

\(^{8}\) Debbie 2008  
\(^{9}\) Paik 2005  
\(^{10}\) Bass 2010
Usual Adult Dose for Hepatic Encephalopathy

Lactulose 30 mL orally 3 times a day or 300 mL in 700 mL water or normal saline as an enema retained for 30-60 minutes every 4 to 6 hours.

Maintenance dose: 30-45 mL orally 3x a day.

Rifaximin 550 mg orally twice a day
Probiotics, Nutrition and Exercise

Probiotics have been found to be effective for HE compared to placebo but not more so than lactulose.¹¹

Nutrition: Cirrhotic patients commonly have malnutrition, muscle wasting (sarcopenia) and reduced survival as a consequence. Research dating back decades has debunked ideas of reducing protein intake as a means of lowering nitrogen load and ammonia burden (see reference below). Indeed, the recommendations now encourage small frequent protein meals throughout the day with a night-time snack of complex carbohydrates. This is often optimized in conjunction with a nutritional support team.

Consensus recommendations of the International Society for Hepatic Encephalopathy and Nitrogen Metabolism include optimal daily caloric intake of 35-40 kcal/kg and protein intake of 1.2-1.5 g/kg ideal body weight and provision of night time supplementation.¹² Zinc is occasionally helpful where there is deficiency or confirmed losses.

Exercise: As with normal patients, exercise in patients with liver disease can improve functional capacity, lean body mass and risk of falls.¹³,¹⁴ Exercise has the potential as an adjunct to improve nutrition, to reduce the frailty of patients that predisposes them to higher ammonia levels and greater risk of falls. However, more studies are needed to clearly identify the parameters for which it can be safe and effective. One can generally expect long-term care residents with multiple co-morbidities to benefit from exercise, with significant improvements in depression and pain relief as a consequence of endorphin release.¹⁵

¹¹ Saab 2016
¹² Amodio 2013
¹³ El-Khoury 2013
¹⁴ Roman 2016
¹⁵ Balchin 2016
Branched Chain Amino Acids (BCAA) & L-Ornithine-L-Aspartate (LOLA)

(BCAA)

- A preparation of amino acids (valine, leucine, and isoleucine) normally given orally or by nasogastric tube, has been postulated to alter the balance of amino acids in the brain as well as to provide energy supplementation. A recent Cochrane review of 16 randomized clinical trials found high quality evidence of clinical benefit but no effect on mortality, quality of life, or nutrition parameters. Thus, for some patients who are intolerant to the recommended protein intake, BCAA supplements may be considered as a means of meeting this nutritional need without risking detrimental effects on the mental state.

(LOLA)

- A combination containing the amino acids ornithine and aspartic acid given by intravenous infusion. A meta-analysis of 20 randomized controlled trials showed LOLA to be as effective as non-absorbable disaccharides, with a trend towards superiority, with few adverse effects.
Liver Transplantation:

Overt HE improves significantly and reverses after liver transplantation, although for some of these patients signs of cognitive impairment persist.\(^{20,21}\) Moreover, the prospect of patients with HE receiving a liver transplant in a timely manner may be hindered by the MELD score (Model for End-Stage Liver Disease), which does not correlate well with this disease entity.\(^{22}\)

Patients resistant to rifaximin and lactulose may be considered for embolization of portosystemic shunts.

Evidence from retrospective studies suggests that the procedure decreases hospital admissions and improves but adverse effects include gastro-esophageal varices, worsening ascites, and renal dysfunction due to contrast-induced nephropathy.\(^{19}\)
# Ongoing Care for HE Patients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom / need</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systolic hypertension</td>
<td>Blood pressure, signs of headaches</td>
<td>Monitor vital signs QD for patients with liver failure, potential for HE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased muscle tonicity (partial or generalized)</td>
<td>Assess increased muscle tone</td>
<td>Monitor for changes in muscle tonicity, difficulty in moving, turning or repositioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myoclonus (decerebrate posturing)</td>
<td>Assess muscle tightness, extremity positioning changes; fall risk; balance scores</td>
<td>Physical Therapy Restorative nursing plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysconjugate eye movements</td>
<td>Monitor eye movements tonicity</td>
<td>Eye tracking charting; convergence, divergence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluid and electrolyte imbalance; clotting disorder</td>
<td>Changes in symptoms</td>
<td>Laboratory draws for electrolytes, bilirubin, prothrombin and pre-albumin; family and patient education; dietary consultation; maintain schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental status changes</td>
<td>Track behaviors, consciousness, aggression, uncooperative behavior, ability to attend to directions and details, and West Haven Criteria</td>
<td>Plan interventions which reduce distress and allow person-centered EBP care; utilize facility behavior tracking sheets; plan activity interventions; incorporate family into 1:1 intervention as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood changes</td>
<td>Mood scores, Depression evaluation, BIMS, Anxiety score, MMSE, Delirium</td>
<td>Person-centered daily care which accommodates needs of patients and family visits; testing and interventions supportive of EBP; meds per physician / NP orders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADL changes</td>
<td>Monitor ADL scores; task segmentation; SOB during care; mobility deficits</td>
<td>Care needs to be individualized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating assistance with caloric management</td>
<td>Weights; Assistance with eating</td>
<td>Small, frequent protein meals; monitor changes in food and fluid intake, as needed; labs as above; weights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-patient updates by IDC team</td>
<td>Monitor for education deficits; Care questions</td>
<td>Team meetings; Rounds with SBAR or IPASS; Regular charting of involvement and updates during condition changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The very effectiveness of treatments for HE and other aspects of chronic liver disease has enabled elderly patients to survive longer with increasingly intensive care, often with substantial discomfort and suffering of the patients and considerable burden on families, caregivers and the healthcare system. Despite this, data from the UK reports that referral to palliative care is low and over 2/3 of patients with liver disease die in the hospital after multiple inpatient hospital stays. The benefits of palliative care are numerous including improved quality of life and prolonged survival.
Roles & Responsibilities

LTC Interdisciplinary Team (IDT)
Dx
- Monitor signs and symptoms of cognitive changes, liver flap, HE, MDS assessment for changes, interim assessment, clinically complex resident with exacerbation of symptoms care planning
- Monitor disease trajectory

Tx
- Medication administration with comfort and polypharmacy
- Compliance of medication consumption
- Community health transitions of care support and follow-up
- Patient and Family Education on medications and compliance
- Provide palliative, progressive disease care and education, and end-of-life (EOL) Hospice Care
Patient Medical History

Attending Physician / APN / PA

Dx
- Clinical History and physical
- Order psychometric tests (PHES: “gold standard”)

Tx
- Prescribe Lactulose and Rifaximin
- Coordinate with other specialists on diagnostics and treatment
Consultant Pharmacist

Dx
• Polypharmacy monitoring
• Drug-drug interactions
• Evidence-based pharmaceutical guides
• Disease-specific evaluation
• Therapeutic response

Tx
• Prescribe Lactulose and Rifaximin
• Coordinate with other specialists on diagnostics and treatment
Dx
• Rule out or treat advanced renal disease and uremia or other conditions

Tx
• Treat renal disease
• Advise multidisciplinary team of implications for clearance of ammonia and other toxic substances
## Diagnostic & Therapeutic Roles

### LTC INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM (IDT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Diagnostic</th>
<th>Therapeutic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nursing Team</strong></td>
<td>Monitor physical and cognitive signs and symptoms of HE, and food acceptance</td>
<td>Patient and family education on medications and compliance, disease trajectory; administer medications, provide behavioral, palliative care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pharmacist</strong></td>
<td>Evaluate and monitor polypharmacy, drug-drug interactions, pharmaceutical guides and evidence based pharmaceutical guides.</td>
<td>Coordinate with other specialists on diagnostics and treatment. Recommend lactulose and rifaximin (AASLD 1-A-1 Guideline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Care Provider</strong></td>
<td>Obtain clinical history, conduct physical exam, and order psychometric tests (PHES: “gold standard”)</td>
<td>Prescribe lactulose and rifaximin; coordinate with other specialists on diagnostics and treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neurologist</strong></td>
<td>Evaluate electroencephalogram (spectral, versus visual EEG)</td>
<td>Treat and manage neurologic disease; manage patient’s pain</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Psychologist</strong></td>
<td>Conduct Stroop test, smartphone application</td>
<td>Provide patient counseling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychiatrist</strong></td>
<td>Assess psychiatric symptoms, alcoholic liver disease, and withdrawal</td>
<td>Provide patient counseling, and management of anxiety, depression and pain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infectious Disease</strong></td>
<td>Rule out, or treat infectious disease having symptoms similar to HE, or which might precipitate or exacerbate HE</td>
<td>Prescribe appropriate antibiotics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Endocrinologist</strong></td>
<td>Identify severe hyperglycemia and poorly-controlled diabetes</td>
<td>Ensure that patient’s glycemic levels are well-controlled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nephrologist</strong></td>
<td>Rule out or treat advanced renal disease and uremia</td>
<td>Treat renal disease; advise interdisciplinary team of implications for clearance of ammonia and other toxic substances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Worker</strong></td>
<td>Get feedback from patient and family on adherence to therapy; provide support and person-centered counseling; monitor for cognitive changes</td>
<td>Coordinate with family and other caregivers to help ensure adherence to therapy; provide support system, and adequate housing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occupational Therapist</strong></td>
<td>Evaluate safety of home and work environments, skill evaluations, driving, and other life skills and activities affected by HE</td>
<td>Advise patient, caregivers and interdisciplinary team of these risks and interventions to minimize them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dietitian</strong></td>
<td>Evaluate adequacy of total caloric and protein intake</td>
<td>Adjust diet to mitigate frailty and sarcopenia</td>
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KTAP
Key Take Away Points
Key Take Away Points

1. Keep HE (Hepatic Encephalopathy) top of mind as one potential cause for ‘Change in Mental Status.’

2. Develop a process for your facility to efficiently and effectively diagnose and treat HE.

3. The AASLD/EASL guideline recommendations are a helpful resource for the management of HE in the LTC environment.

4. Lactulose and rifaximin post an episode of OHE is a well studied combination and proven to reduce the risk of OHE recurrence and HE related hospitalizations.

5. Include all members of the IDT in this process with a continuous quality improvement (CQI) process to assure that appropriate outcomes are being met.
References:
References: (continued)


