

PACU NURSING PROTOCOL FOR SUSPECTED CORNEAL ABRASIONS

Team Leaders: Katherine Duncan MD, Caron Hong MD, Beatrice Hazzard RN MS CPAN
University of Maryland Medical Center, Baltimore, Maryland

Team Members: Laura Haines BSN RN CPAN, Lynnae Elliotte MSN RN CPAN CCRN,
Michaela Mathews MD

Background Information: Despite efforts to protect the eyes during the perioperative period, corneal abrasions can occur due to incomplete eye closure during surgery, tape in contact with the eye or the patient rubbing their eyes while awakening from anesthesia. Traditionally, the practice for dealing with a suspected corneal abrasion in the University of Maryland Medical Center (UMMC) adult post anesthesia care unit (PACU) has been to notify the attending or covering anesthesiologist who would arrange an ophthalmology consult. The consults may be delayed, thus leading to prolonged patient discomfort and delayed treatment.

Objectives of Project: The primary objective was to develop and implement a Corneal Abrasion Protocol to expedite pain relief and treatment to patients with suspected corneal abrasions.

Process of Implementation: The process of developing a protocol to detect and begin treatment of suspected corneal abrasions in the adult PACU was initiated by the ophthalmology service. The director of the ophthalmology consult service and an ophthalmology resident created guidelines to be used for inpatients and outpatients. Several meetings were held to discuss the protocol and obtain input from PACU nurses, the PACU nurse manager and the medical director of the PACU. The protocol went through the hospital approval process and the staff was educated.

Statement of Successful Practice: Since the implementation of the PACU Nursing Protocol for Corneal Abrasions, nurses in our adult PACU have been able to initiate timely treatment of patient's eye pain. Nurses have stated that patients, in most cases, describe an immediate improvement in pain.

Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing: As the patient awakens from anesthesia and becomes aware of the pain and discomfort associated with a suspected corneal abrasion, the PACU nurse is often the first clinician to detect this condition. The Nursing Protocol for Corneal Abrasions provides nurses the opportunity to initiate a process that can improve the patient experience. Implementing a standardized nursing protocol in the PACU to detect and if present, treat corneal abrasions facilitates early intervention for this condition which can reduce corneal complications and eye pain among patients undergoing surgery.