Geriatric Emergencies

Geriatrics

- Geriatric patients are individuals older than 65 years of age.
- In 2000, the geriatric population was almost 35 million.
- By 2020, the geriatric population is projected to be greater than 54 million.

Geriatrics

- Older people are major users of EMS and health care in general.
- Effective treatment will require an increased understanding of geriatric care issues.

Communications

- Show the patient respect.
- Position yourself at eye level in front of the patient.
- Speak slowly and distinctly.
- Give the patient time to answer.
- Be patient.

Communications

Older patients may need a little more time to process your question.

The GEMS Diamond

- Geriatric patients: Normal aging, atypical presentation
- Environmental assessment: Safety, neglect
- Medical assessment: Past history, medications
- Social assessment: Basic needs, social network
### Leading Causes of Death
- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Stroke
- COPD and other respiratory illnesses
- Diabetes
- Trauma

### Common Stereotypes
- Common stereotypes include mental confusion, illness, sedentary lifestyle, and immobility
- Older people can stay fit; most older people lead very active lives.

### Physiologic Changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Changes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skin</td>
<td>Susceptible to injury, longer healing time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senses</td>
<td>Dulling of the senses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory system</td>
<td>Decreased ability to exchange gases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cardiovascular system</td>
<td>Increased risk of cardiovascular disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renal system</td>
<td>Decline in kidney function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous system</td>
<td>Memory impairment, decreased psychomotor skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musculoskeletal system</td>
<td>Decrease in muscle mass and strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gastrointestinal system</td>
<td>Decrease in ability of body to digest food properly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Polypharmacy
- Older people account for a large portion of overall medication usage.
- Many medications can have interactions or counter actions when taken together.
- Polypharmacy refers to the use of multiple prescriptions by a single patient.
Geriatrics and Trauma

• An older patient may have decreased ability to localize even simple injuries.
• Assessment must include all past medical conditions.

Cardiovascular Emergencies

• Syncope
  – Interruption of blood flow to the brain
  – Many underlying causes
• Heart attack
  – Classic symptoms often not present

Acute Abdomen

• Acute abdominal aneurysm
  – Walls of the aorta weaken
  – Treat for shock and provide prompt transport.
• Gastrointestinal bleeding
  – Blood in emesis
  – May cause shock

Acute Abdomen

• Bowel obstructions
  – Vagus nerve is stimulated and produces vasovagal syndrome.
  – Vasovagal syndrome can cause dizziness and fainting.
  – Patient requires transport to rule out other conditions.

Older patients with abdominal pain have higher chances of hospitalization, surgery, and death than younger patients.

Altered Mental Status

• Delirium
  – Recent onset
  – Usually associated with underlying cause
• Dementia
  – Develops slowly over a period of years
Psychiatric Emergencies

• Depression is common among older adults.
• Physical pain, psychological distress, and loss of loved ones can lead to depression.
• Women are more likely to suffer depression.

Psychiatric Emergencies

• Older men have the highest suicide rate.
• Older patients use much more lethal means.
• EMT-Bs should consider all suicidal thoughts or actions to be serious.

Advance Directives

• Do not resuscitate (DNR) orders give you permission not to attempt to resuscitate.
• DNR orders may only be valid in the health care facility.
• You should know state and local protocols regarding advance directives.
• When in doubt, initiate resuscitation.

Advance Directives

• This problem is largely hidden from society.
• Definitions of abuse and neglect among older people vary.
• Victims are often hesitant to report an incident.
• Signs of abuse are often overlooked.

Elder Abuse

Nursing home residents who receive no visitors have a higher likelihood of abuse and neglect.

Elder Abuse

• Repeated visits to the emergency room
• A history of being "accident prone"
• Soft-tissue injuries
• Vague explanation of injuries
• Psychosomatic complaints

Assessment of Elder Abuse
Assessment of Elder Abuse

- Chronic pain
- Self-destructive behavior
- Eating and sleeping disorders
- Depression or a lack of energy
- Substance and/or sexual abuse

Signs of Physical Abuse

- Signs of abuse may be obvious or subtle.
- Obvious signs include bruises, bites, and burns.
- Look for injuries to the ears.
- Consider injuries to the genitals or rectum with no reported trauma as evidence of abuse.

Questions?