

In its June 2002 Information Bulletin, the Council warned of the cases of awareness combined with respiratory depression or arrest occurring when IV lines containing relaxant or other drugs are not flushed at the end of the case. However, this problem continues to be reported and the recommendations issued by the Royal Children's Hospital (below) are recommended both for adults and children.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ROUTINE FLUSHING OF INTRAVENOUS LINES

INTRODUCTION

Residual drugs in intravenous lines and non-return valves or bungs create a potential for morbidity that is preventable.

Several incidents have occurred where drugs have been administered in theatre (usually at the end of a case) and small quantities have remained in the intravenous line. These drugs have then been inadvertently flushed in at a later time resulting in the unexpected collapse of the patient. Situations where this scenario is particularly dangerous are in paediatric patients, when drugs such as muscle relaxants, respiratory depressants or high dose anti-coagulants are involved, or when drugs are administered in a pressured environment at the end of a case and other activities distract the anaesthetist from flushing the line.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Any person administering a drug to a patient is responsible for the management of the patient and of the intravenous line. Any drug given at the end of a case should be flushed through with saline or appropriate solution.

On handing over a patient in the recovery room (PACU) or on the ward, both nurse and practitioner must confirm that the intravenous line has been flushed. If the line has NOT been flushed, the practitioner whom last administered any drug must assume responsibility for the line and take appropriate action (aspirate, flush, remove, etc). The practitioner must not hand over responsibility until this is done.

COMMENT

Advantages of flushing intravenous (IV) lines at the end of a case :

1. Removes residual drugs
2. Confirms correct placement of IV
3. Confirms patency of IV
4. Confirms secure connection of IV