Patients in Law Enforcement Custody

Signs and Symptoms

- External signs of trauma
- Palpitations
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Altered mental status
- Intoxication/substance abuse

History

- Traumatic injury
- Drug abuse
- Cardiac history
- Psychiatric history

Differential

- Agitated delirium secondary to psychiatric illness or substance abuse
- Traumatic injury
- Closed head injury
- Asthma exacerbation
- Cardiac dysrhythmia
- Other causes of altered mental status

Care

B E I P

Determine that the scene is safe to enter.

Follow General Directive #3, Orders for all Patients.

If evidence of traumatic injury or medical illness, follow appropriate protocol and transport.

Address the following situations as needed

Pepper Spray

B E I P

Remove contaminated clothing and irrigate face/eyes with copious amounts of saline.

Refer to Trauma Protocol #3 Eye injuries/complaints for further management.

Taser

Taser probe removal is to be performed by law enforcement personnel.

B E I P

Perform wound care as needed.

I P

Initiate cardiac monitoring and consider obtaining a 12 lead if the patient has cardiac history or presents with heart palpitations, chest pain, or abnormal pulse.

Evidence of Agitated Delirium

B E I P

Consider following Non-cardiac Emergencies Protocol #4 Behavioral Emergencies.

Pearls

- Law enforcement may accompany a handcuffed patient in the ambulance depending on the patient's condition.
- Agitated delirium is characterized by marked restlessness, irritability, and/or high fever. Patients exhibiting these signs are at a high risk for sudden death.
- Use caution in patients with a history of asthma who have been exposed to pepper spray.
- The role of EMS is not to “clear” patients for release to law enforcement custody. If law enforcement calls for EMS assistance, the expectation is patient transport allowing for the standard informed consent/ refusal process as usual. Consult medical control in any uncertain circumstances.

Performance indicators

- Coordinate all treatments with patient, law enforcement, and medical control if necessary.