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Thyroid Storm

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ABSTRACT:

Audience: This simulation is designed to educate emergency medicine residents and medical students on the recognition and management for thyroid storm.

Introduction: Hyperthyroidism is a condition in which the thyroid gland produces too much thyroid hormone. This can usually be controlled with medications; however, 1%-2% of patients will develop thyroid storm, which is a life-threatening condition. If not treated emergently, thyroid storm can lead to end-organ damage and cardiovascular collapse.¹ Thyroid storm has a nonspecific presentation with signs and symptoms including hyperpyrexia, tachycardia, central nervous system (CNS) dysfunction, and gastrointestinal (GI) manifestations; all of these mimic many other more common emergency department (ED) presentations.² Therefore, it is important for medical providers to recognize associated symptoms, have a high suspicion for the diagnosis based on patient presentation, and quickly provide necessary treatment to stabilize the patient.

Educational Objectives: By the end of this simulation session, the learner will be able to: 1) understand the essential physical exam components necessary to evaluate for etiologies of acute encephalopathy, 2) review laboratory and imaging studies to obtain for evaluation of acute encephalopathy and/or suspected thyroid storm, as well as the rationale behind ordering each study, 3) identify underlying etiologies or pathologies for developing thyroid storm, 4) discuss treatment for thyroid storm.

Educational Methods: This session is conducted using high-fidelity simulation, followed by a debriefing session on evaluation for and treatment of thyroid storm. However, it could also be run as an oral boards case.

Research Methods: Our residents are provided a survey at the completion of the debriefing session so they may rate different aspects of the simulation, as well as provide qualitative feedback on the scenario.

Results: Feedback was largely positive, with a potential broad differential and specific treatment regimen cited as beneficial to review. The residents voiced appreciation at seeing a photograph of the patient's face at the beginning of the case, as the ophthalmopathy was difficult to reproduce on the mannequin.





Discussion: This is a cost-effective method for reviewing thyroid storm. Learners had a wide range of narrow versus broad differentials, as well as comfort level with treatment. Having the pharmacist unavailable to answer their questions caused them to rely on alternative sources of knowledge, typically, their cell phones. Our main take-away is to continue providing visual stimuli to enhance a physical exam in order to bolster psychological buy-in.

Topics: Medical simulation, endocrine emergencies, thyroid disorders, thyroid storm, hyperthyroidism.





List of Resources: Abstract User Guide Instructor Materials

Operator Materials 16
Debriefing and Evaluation Pearls 18
Simulation Assessment 20

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Learner Audience:

Medical students, interns, junior residents, senior residents

Time Required for Implementation:

Instructor Preparation: 30 minutes

Time for case: 20 minutes
Time for debriefing: 30 minutes

Recommended Number of Learners per Instructor:

3-4

Topics:

Medical simulation, endocrine emergencies, thyroid disorders, thyroid storm, hyperthyroidism.

Objectives

By the end of this simulation session and debriefing, the learner will be able to:

- Understand the essential physical exam components necessary to evaluate for etiologies of acute encephalopathy.
- Review laboratory and imaging studies to obtain for evaluation of acute encephalopathy and/or suspected thyroid storm, as well as the rationale behind ordering each study.
- 3. Identify underlying etiologies or pathologies for developing thyroid storm.
- 4. Discuss treatment for thyroid storm.

Linked objectives and methods:

Thyroid storm is an uncommon ED presentation, and many of the symptoms are consistent with much more common ED diagnoses. The most important tool for diagnosis of this lifethreatening condition is having a high clinical suspicion. This simulation scenario allows learners to review the patient presentation, highlights the importance of the prehospital history and of obtaining pertinent past medical history and a current medication list. Learners will have the opportunity to perform initial assessment and provide appropriate resuscitation of a critically ill patient (objective 1). They will work through a differential diagnosis for life-threatening causes of altered mental status and order appropriate tests and

workup to narrow the differential (objective 2). Learners will need to identify possible underlying etiologies (objective 3) and initiate treatment (objective 4). Afterwards, there will be discussion about the etiology, pathophysiology, and mechanism of action of the pharmacologic treatment of thyroid storm (objectives 1-4).

Recommended pre-reading for instructor:

We recommend that instructors become familiar with the 2016 American Thyroid Association Guidelines for Diagnosis and Management of Hyperthyroidism.¹ Other suggested reading includes the materials listed below under "References/suggestions for further reading."

Results and tips for successful implementation:

This simulation was written to be performed as a high-fidelity simulation scenario but may also be used as a mock oral board case. We conducted this scenario approximately twelve times for fifty emergency medicine residents broken into groups of four during August-September 2018. The residents voiced appreciation at seeing a photograph of the patient's face at the beginning of the case, as the ophthalmopathy was difficult to reproduce on the mannequin. Depending on the desired level of autonomy, faculty may inform learners their pharmacist is at lunch, so they are unable to ask them recommended doses and instead must look them up on smart phones or provided computers. We typically do not allow pharmacists in simulation cases to make clinical suggestions, but may provide dosages for rarely-used medications.

References/suggestions for further reading:

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Case Title: Thyroid Storm

Case Description & Diagnosis (short synopsis): Patient is a 75-year-old female is brought in by emergency medical services (EMS) with complaint of agitation. A bystander in grocery store called 911 because the patient was agitated, yelling and swearing at bystanders. Patient is found to be in atrial fibrillation with rapid ventricular response and a low-grade fever. If requested, EMS or the nurse will provide the team with the patient's purse, which contains her home medications. Her physical exam is remarkable for a thyroid goiter and bilateral proptosis. Labs are remarkable for leukocytosis, a low TSH (thyroid-stimulating hormone), and an elevated free T4. Learners should suspect thyroid storm and administer propranolol, a thioamide, glucocorticoids, and arrange for iodine to be administered an hour after thioamide has been given. If beta-blockers are not ordered, the patient will become more tachycardic. If iodine is administered less than an hour after thioamide is administered, the patient will become more agitated and tachycardic until additional beta-blockade is administered. Team should have a low threshold to administer broad-spectrum antibiotics to cover possible underlying infection. The patient should then be admitted to the intensive care unit.

Equipment or Props Needed:

High-fidelity adult simulation mannequin

Foam or cotton balls to place under the mannequin's anterior neck skin to simulate a goiter Angiocaths for peripheral intravenous access (18g, 20g, 22g)

Cardiac monitor

Pulse oximetry

Intravenous (IV) pole

Normal saline (1L x2)

Lumbar task trainer

Pill bottles with blank labels for patient's home medications: Citalopram 20mg daily, propylthiouracil (PTU) 100mg three times daily, Seroquel 150mg daily, hydrochlorothiazide 25mg daily.

Medications for treatment: 0.5-1mg IV propranolol, 60-80mg oral (PO) propranolol, esmolol drip, 600mg PO PTU, 20-25mg PO methimazole, 100mg IV hydrocortisone.

Confederates needed:

Primary nurse



Stimulus Inventory:

- #1 Picture of Grave's ophthalmopathy and goiter
- #2 ECG: Atrial fibrillation with rapid ventricular response
- #3 Complete blood count (CBC)
- #4 Basic metabolic panel (BMP)
- #5 Liver function panel
- #6 Ammonia
- #7 Thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH)
- #8 Free T4
- #9 Lactate
- #10 Troponin
- #11 Salicylate level
- #12 Acetaminophen level
- #13 Ethanol level
- #14 Urine toxicology screen
- #15 Urinalysis
- #16 Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) studies
- #17 Blood glucose
- #18 Portable chest X-ray
- #19 Head computed tomography (CT)

Background and brief information: Patient is a 75-year-old female brought in by EMS for agitation. A bystander in a grocery store called 911 because the patient was agitated, yelling and swearing at bystanders.

Initial presentation: Patient is a 75-year-old female who appears her stated age, but appears disheveled and diaphoretic. She is intermittently yelling at the nurse and anyone who comes near her bed.

How the scenario unfolds: Participants should perform a complete physical exam, including skin, back, and neurologic evaluations. If they ask about home medications, nursing can provide the team with the patient's purse, which includes her home medications. Participants should have a low threshold to evaluate and treat for other causes of encephalopathy or potential precipitants for her thyroid storm, which may include performing a lumbar puncture. The patient will initially be too agitated to have this performed and will require medication to do so. Once beta-blockade is ordered, her tachycardia will improve. If iodine is ordered less



than an hour after thioamide is administered, she will become more agitated and tachycardic until given additional beta-blockade. Case should be discussed with endocrinology and the intensivist, then admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU).

Critical actions:

- 1. Obtain a point-of-care blood glucose.
- 2. Review patient's home medications.
- 3. Evaluate for infection through physical exam and laboratory tests (urinalysis, chest X-ray).
- 4. Obtain a TSH and free T4.
- 5. Treat with a beta blocker, thioamide, and glucocorticoid.
- 6. Order iodine to be given an hour after thioamide is administered.
- 7. Admit to a critical care bed.



Case title: Thyroid Storm

Chief Complaint: Agitation

Vitals: Heart Rate (HR) 145 Blood Pressure (BP) 170/100 Respiratory Rate (RR) 18

Temperature (T) 100°F Oxygen Saturation (O₂Sat) 98% on room air

General Appearance: Diaphoretic, confused

Primary Survey:

• Airway: patent

• **Breathing:** clear to auscultation bilaterally

• Circulation: irregular tachycardic rhythm, 2+ symmetric radial pulses bilaterally, capillary

refill 2-3 seconds

History:

• **History of present illness:** Unable to obtain from the patient due to her agitation, outside of paramedic report.

• Past medical history: unknown (however, paramedics have patient's medications if asked).

• Past surgical history: unknown

• Patient's medications: unknown

• Allergies: unknown

• Social history: unknown

• Family history: unknown

Secondary Survey/Physical Examination:

• **General appearance:** Diaphoretic, confused

• HEENT:

Head: within normal limits
 Eyes: bilateral proptosis
 Ears: within normal limits

Nose: within normal limitsThroat: within normal limits

• Neck: midline goiter

• Heart: irregular rhythm, tachycardic rate. Otherwise within normal limits





• Lungs: within normal limits

• Abdominal/GI: within normal limits

• **Genitourinary:** within normal limits

• Rectal: within normal limits

• Extremities: within normal limits

• Back: within normal limits

• Neuro: delirious and verbally agitated. Otherwise, within normal limits

• **Skin:** diaphoretic

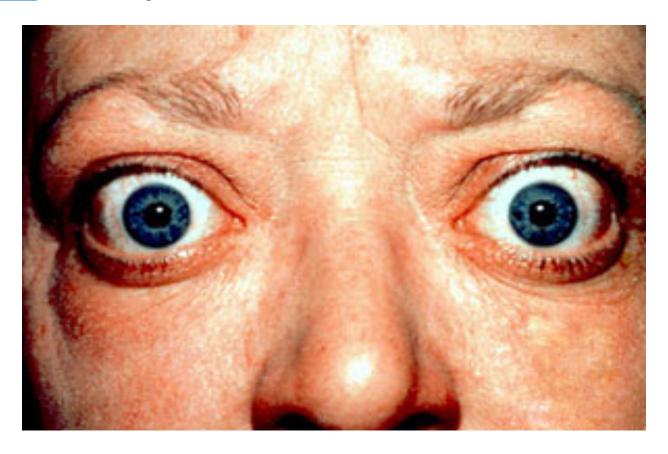


Results:

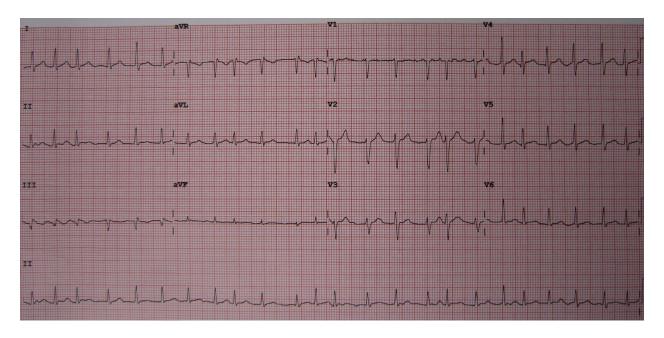
Picture of Grave's ophthalmopathy and goiter

Trobe, J. Photograph showing a classic finding of Graves' Disease, proptosis and lid retraction. In: Wikimedia Commons.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Proptosis and lid retraction from Graves%27 Disease.jpg. Published August 15, 2011. CC BY 3.0.



ECG: Atrial fibrillation with rapid ventricular response
Heilman, J. Rapid atrial fibrillation at a rate of 150. In: Wikimedia Commons.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atrial fibrillation#/media/File:RapidAFib150.jpg. Published June 15, 2011. CC BY-SA 3.0.



Complete blood count (CBC)

White blood count (WBC) 15.4 x1000/mm³

Hemoglobin (Hgb) 12.0 g/dL Hematocrit (HCT) 33.7%

Platelet (Plt) 580 x1000/mm³

Bands: 19%

Basic metabolic panel (BMP)

Sodium 138 mEq/L Chloride 99 mEq/L Potassium 4.0 mEq/L 18 mEq/L Bicarbonate (HCO₃) 30 mg/dL Blood Urea Nitrogen (BUN) Creatine (Cr) 1.1 mg/dL 90 mg/dL Glucose Calcium 8.0 mg/dL

Liver Function Tests (LFTs)

Aspartate Aminotransferase (AST)

Alanine Aminotransferase (ALT)

Total Bilirubin (T bili)

Direct Bilirubin (D bili)

Albumin

Alkaline Phosphate (alk phos)

Total Protein:

30 Units/L

0.8 mg/dL

0.2 mg/dL

100 Units/L

7.0 g/dL

Ammonia 30 umol/L

Thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) 0.001 mlU/L

Free thyroxine (free T4) 6.4 ng/dL

Lactic Acid 2.1 mmol/L

Troponin 0.09 mcg/L

Salicylate level None detected

Acetaminophen level None detected

Ethanol <0.01 mg/dL

Urine Toxicology Screen

Negative **Amphetamines Barbiturates** Negative Benzodiazepines Negative Cocaine Negative Methadone Negative **Opiates** Negative Oxycodone Negative **PCP** Negative THC Negative

Urinalysis (UA)

Leukocyte esterase negative
Nitrites negative
Blood none
Ketones 2+
Glucose none

Color dark yellow

White blood cells (WBC) 5-10 WBCs/high powered field (HPF)

Red blood cells (RBC) 0-5 RBCs/HPF Squamous epithelial cells 0-5 cells/HPF

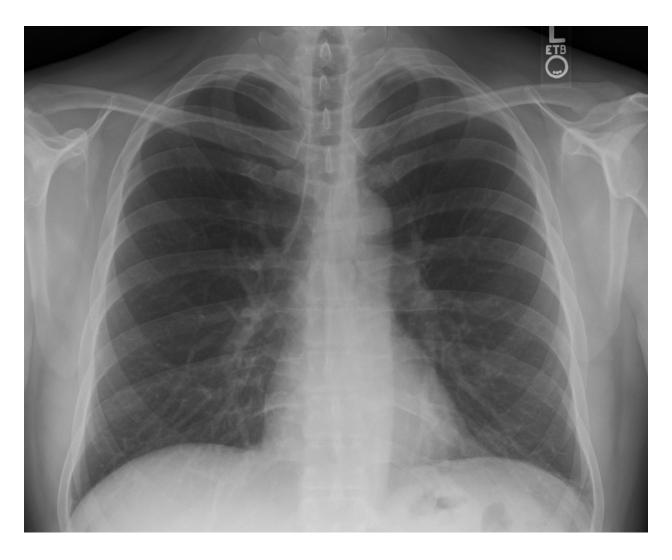
Specific gravity 1.015

Blood glucose 100 mg/dL



Chest Radiograph

Stillwaterising. Chest X-ray PA. In: Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chest Xray PA 3-8-2010.png. Published March 8, 2010. Public domain.

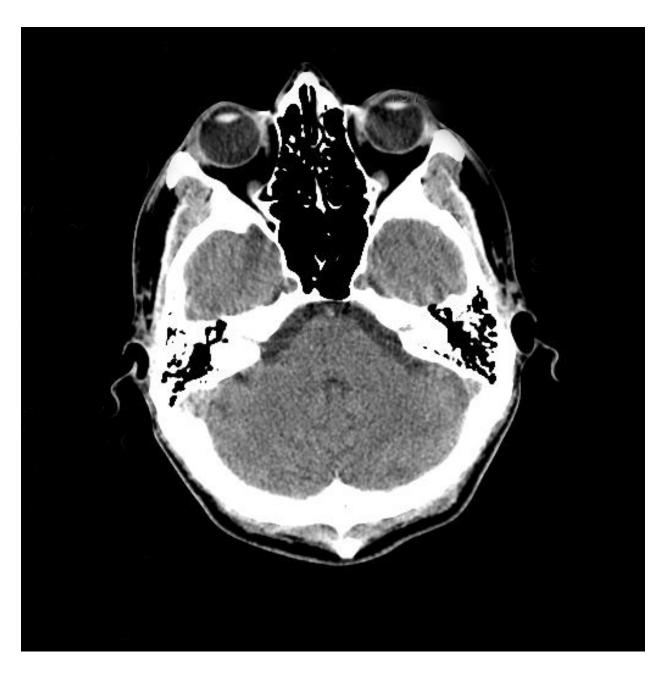




Non-contrast head CT

Ciscel, A. Normal CT scan of the head; this slice shows the cerebellum, a small portion of each temporal lobe, the orbits, and the sinuses. In: Wikimedia Commons.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Head CT scan.jpg. Published 12 August 2005. CC BY-SA 2.0.





SIMULATION EVENTS TABLE:

Minute (state)	Participant action/ trigger	Patient status (simulator response) & operator prompts	Monitor display (vital signs)
0:00 (Baseline)	Case begins, participants place the patient on the monitor and obtain history	Paramedics provide brief history	No vitals should be displayed until requested BP 170/100 HR 145 (afib) RR 18 O2 98% RA Temp 100F
5:00	Patient should be examined, home medications reviewed, and labs ordered	If the team does not ask paramedics for home medications, nursing can prompt: "Oh, the squad left her purse. Here it is." If team requests a lumbar puncture (LP), patient will be too agitated to be compliant until given a medication for agitation. Satisfactory response will be decided by the facilitator, given the medication and dose selected. If propranolol or esmolol are ordered, BP and heart rate will improve. If a beta-blocker is not ordered, patient's vitals will worsen	With beta- blockade BP 150/90 HR 110 (afib) RR 18 O2 98% RA Temp 100F Without beta- blockade BP 170/100 HR 160 (afib) RR 24 O2 98% RA Temp 100F
7:00	Propranolol or esmolol given, and thioamide and steroids are ordered	If iodine is ordered before an hour after thioamide is administered, patient will again become more tachycardic and agitated until more beta-blockade is administered (if given additional beta-blockade, see first set of vitals in 5:00 above for subsequent vitals) If learners call endocrinology or ICU prior to administering a thioamide, they will be busy and will not call back until treatment is completed If thioamide was ordered before endocrine or ICU is contacted, have the learners present the case,	If iodine is ordered less than an hour after thioamide given: BP 170/100 HR 150 (afib) RR 18 O2 98% RA Temp 100F





Minute (state)	Participant action/ trigger	Patient status (simulator response) & operator prompts	Monitor display (vital signs)
		endocrinology/ICU can make final recommendations, then end scenario.	If iodine is ordered for an hour after thioamide: BP 150/80 HR 90 (afib) RR 16 O2 98% RA Temp 100F

Diagnosis:

Thyroid storm

Disposition:

Admit to the intensive care unit



DEBRIEFING AND EVALUATION PEARLS

Thyroid Storm

Pearls

- Thyroid storm is a not a diagnosis which ED providers will commonly encounter; however, it is important to be able to recognize quickly because the condition can be life-threatening. About 1%-2% of patients with hyperthyroidism will develop thyroid storm, but often the etiology of the progression to storm is unclear.¹
- A focused history should be obtained, including use of amiodarone, inappropriate hormone ingestion for weight loss, recent surgery, or radioiodine therapy.
- The most common presenting signs and symptoms include hyperpyrexia, tachycardia, CNS dysfunction, and GI manifestations.²⁻⁴
- The workup should include tests to evaluate for an underlying etiology, such as infection, heat related illness, or toxidromes. These diagnostic studies may include blood cultures, urinalysis, a chest x-ray, and/or CT head.
- Initial pharmacologic treatment includes a thioamide, a non-selective beta blocker, as well as glucocorticoid. The American Thyroid Association recommends propylthiouracil (PTU) as the first-choice thioamide due to its additional benefit of blocking peripheral conversion of T4 to T3; however, methimazole is also an acceptable option.³ PTU is administered as a 600mg oral loading dose followed by 250mg every 4 hours.⁵
- The most common non-selective beta blocker described in the literature is propranolol with a dose of either 1-2mg IV q15 minutes or 60-120 mg PO q6 hours.^{2, 5}
- Glucocorticoids are used to block peripheral conversion of T4 to T3. They are given in the form of stress-dose steroids; 300mg hydrocortisone IV loading dose, followed by 100mg q8 hours.⁵ This also serves to counteract adrenal insufficiency in the shock state.^{2,4}
- Iodine is also included in the treatment; however, it is important to note that one must wait at least 1 hour after administration of the thioamide before giving iodine. This waiting period prevents further synthesis of new thyroid hormone before adequate blockade of the thyroid hormone synthesis pathway is achieved.^{6, 7} Iodine can be given via Lugol's solution or SSKI. Dosing is 8 drops of Lugol's every 6 hours or 5 drops of SSKI every 6 hours.^{2, 5} The typical supportive care measures of antipyretics, volume resuscitation, and blood pressure support also apply. Avoid administration of salicylates, since this may increase the level of free thyroid hormones
- Providers should keep in mind the pathophysiology of this condition when considering other medication use. Avoidance of anything that may increase sympathetic tone is important; i.e. albuterol or pseudoephedrine.⁶





DEBRIEFING AND EVALUATION PEARLS

 These patients require a final disposition of admission to an intensive care unit due to the potential for cardiovascular collapse as well as close monitoring and frequent medication dosing required during the acute phase of the illness.

Other debriefing points:

- 1. Closed-loop communication amongst team: was it used? Why or why not? Were there any implications of this during case execution?
 - a. Closed-loop communication is important for effective and efficient resuscitation and medical care. This is especially true in situations that are high stress or low-frequency presentations that are not practiced often. Some of the most common medical errors are due to lack of communication. When there are multiple team members involved in patient care, closed-loop communication allows for safety checks. Thyroid storm is not a common presentation and as such the medications are not frequently encountered for this indication. Closed-loop communication between the pharmacist, prescribing physician, and nurse is essential to ensure appropriate medication delivery to the patient. It is important to share results with all team members. When lab results or imaging comes back, is critical to ensure everyone is aware of the current clinical picture. One example of good communication during resuscitation includes "if this.... then this...." scenarios. When a team member gives information and states "if this happens, then we will (do this)," the communication allows all members involved to be on the same page, and the resuscitation will be significantly more effective.
- 2. Did the team discuss a differential for emergent causes of altered mental status? Was the appropriate workup done to rule out other causes of the presentation or possibly underlying causes of the development of thyroid storm?
 - a. Important to this scenario is discussing a list of differential diagnoses and the tests that will be ordered to narrow that differential. To avoid anchoring, the team should include workup for intracranial processes, toxidromes or ingestions, as well as infection. Additionally, thyroid storm may be precipitated when a patient with hyperthyroidism develops an underlying stimulus such as infection, diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA), medication change, recent surgery, or trauma to name a few. Recognition of these underlying precipitants and treatment of the underlying cause, in addition to the hyperthyroid state, is crucial to resolution of the illness.



211910111 2101			
Learner:			

Assessment Timeline

This timeline is to help observers assess their learners. It allows observer to make notes on when learners performed various tasks, which can help guide debriefing discussion.

Critical Actions:

- 1. Obtain a point-of-care blood glucose
- 2. Review patient's home medications
- 3. Evaluate for infection through physical exam and laboratory tests (urinalysis, chest x-ray)
- 4. Obtain a TSH and free T4
- 5. Treat with a non-specific beta blocker, thioamide, and glucocorticoid
- 6. Order iodine to be given an hour after thioamide is administered
- 7. Admit to a critical care bed

0:00



Thyroid Storm

Lea	arner:
Cri	tical Actions:
	Obtain a point-of-care blood glucose
	Review patient's home medications
	Evaluate for infection through physical exam and laboratory tests (urinalysis, chest x-ray)
	Obtain a TSH and free T4
	Treat with a non-specific beta blocker, thioamide, and glucocorticoid
	Order iodine to be given an hour after thioamide is administered
	Admit to a critical care bed

Summative and formative comments:



,				

Learner:

Milestones assessment:

	Milestone	Did not	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
		achieve			
		level 1			
1	Emergency Stabilization (PC1)	Did not achieve Level 1	Recognizes abnormal vital signs	Recognizes an unstable patient, requiring intervention Performs primary assessment Discerns data to formulate a diagnostic impression/plan	Manages and prioritizes critical actions in a critically ill patient Reassesses after implementing a stabilizing intervention
2	Performance of focused history and physical (PC2)	Did not achieve Level 1	Performs a reliable, comprehensive history and physical exam	Performs and communicates a focused history and physical exam based on chief complaint and urgent issues	Prioritizes essential components of history and physical exam given dynamic circumstances
3	Diagnostic studies (PC3)	Did not achieve Level 1	Determines the necessity of diagnostic studies	Orders appropriate diagnostic studies. Performs appropriate bedside diagnostic studies/procedures	Prioritizes essential testing Interprets results of diagnostic studies Reviews risks, benefits, contraindications, and alternatives to a diagnostic study or procedure
4	Diagnosis (PC4)	Did not achieve Level 1	Considers a list of potential diagnoses	Considers an appropriate list of potential diagnosis May or may not make correct diagnosis	Makes the appropriate diagnosis Considers other potential diagnoses, avoiding premature closure



SIMULATION ASSESSMENT

Thyroid Storm

Learner:

	Milestone	Did not	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
		achieve level 1			
5	Pharmacotherapy (PC5)	Did not achieve Level 1	Asks patient for drug allergies	Selects an medication for therapeutic intervention, consider potential adverse effects	Selects the most appropriate medication and understands mechanism of action, effect, and potential side effects Considers and recognizes drug-drug interactions
6	Observation and reassessment (PC6)	Did not achieve Level 1	Reevaluates patient at least one time during case	Reevaluates patient after most therapeutic interventions	Consistently evaluates the effectiveness of therapies at appropriate intervals
7	Disposition (PC7)	Did not achieve Level 1	Appropriately selects whether to admit or discharge the patient	Appropriately selects whether to admit or discharge Involves the expertise of some of the appropriate specialists	Educates the patient appropriately about their disposition Assigns patient to an appropriate level of care (ICU/Tele/Floor) Involves expertise of all appropriate specialists
9	General Approach to Procedures (PC9)	Did not achieve Level 1	Identifies pertinent anatomy and physiology for a procedure Uses appropriate Universal Precautions	Obtains informed consent Knows indications, contraindications, anatomic landmarks, equipment, anesthetic and procedural technique, and potential complications for common ED procedures	Determines a back-up strategy if initial attempts are unsuccessful Correctly interprets results of diagnostic procedure



Learner:			

	Milestone	Did not	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
		achieve			
		level 1			
20	Professional Values (PROF1)	Did not achieve Level 1	Demonstrates caring, honest behavior	Exhibits compassion, respect, sensitivity and responsiveness	Develops alternative care plans when patients' personal beliefs and decisions preclude standard care
22	Patient centered communication (ICS1)	Did not achieve level 1	Establishes rapport and demonstrates empathy to patient (and family) Listens effectively	Elicits patient's reason for seeking health care	Manages patient expectations in a manner that minimizes potential for stress, conflict, and misunderstanding. Effectively communicates with vulnerable populations, (at risk patients and families)
23	Team management (ICS2)	Did not achieve level 1	Recognizes other members of the patient care team during case (nurse, techs)	Communicates pertinent information to other healthcare colleagues	Communicates a clear, succinct, and appropriate handoff with specialists and other colleagues Communicates effectively with ancillary staff