Delirium – Searching for the Cause

**Delirium Symptom List from CAM**
- Sudden change in mental status
- Change in behavior: fluctuates from normal to abnormal over hours to days to weeks (<1 mo)
- Difficulty in focusing attention
- Disorganized thinking and/or altered level of consciousness

Begin your assessment with the highest probable risk for your patient’s situation.

**Drug Toxicity?**
- a. On more than six medications, especially:
  - anticonvulsants
  - histamine H₂ antagonist
  - insulin/hypoglycemic agent
  - antipsychotics
  - benzodiazepines
  - narcotics
- b. Receiving a medication for more than 5 years
- c. Age 75 or older
- d. Running drug levels beyond or at the high level of therapeutic range

**Sleep Disturbance?**
- a. Assess baseline normal sleep pattern
- b. Identify causes of sleep disturbance (Medications, pain and/or environment)

**Infection?**
- a. Elevation in baseline temperature, even less than 37.56°C rectally
- b. History of lower respiratory infection or UTI more than twice per year
- c. History of any chronic infection
- d. Recent episode of falling

**Changes in Chronic Illness?**
Physical and psychosocial assessment reveals exacerbation of previously diagnosed condition, such as:
- Diabetes mellitus
- COPD
- Cerebrovascular insufficiency
- Cancer
- Depression
- Substance misuse (e.g., alcohol, drugs, tobacco)

Request appropriate diagnostic tests

**Elimination Problems?**
- a. Urinary problems
  1. History of incontinence, retention, or indwelling catheter
  2. Signs or symptoms of dehydration, tenting, increased BUN
  3. Decreased urinary output
  4. Taking anticholinergic medication
  5. Abdominal distention
- b. Gastrointestinal problems
  1. Immobility for more than 1 day in persons previously mobile
  2. Abdominal distention
  3. Decreased number of bowel movements or constipated stool
  4. Decreased fluid intake – dehydration
  5. Decreased food intake, especially bulk

**Discharge Home?**
- a. Review pain management/Opioids
- b. Review mobility, skin and wound assessment
- c. Any reactions to anesthetic, analgesic

**Post Surgical?**
- Promote mobilization, activity, and manage pain

**New Disease Process?**
- a. Cardio and cerebrovascular conditions
  1. Silent MI
  2. TIA/CVA
  3. CHF or
- b. GI conditions, GI bleed, if evidence of daily use of NSAIDS or steroids or
- c. Other medical conditions
  1. Hypo/hyperglycemia
  2. Hypo/hyperthyroidism
  3. Electrolyte imbalance
  4. Neurological conditions (e.g. normal pressure hydrocephalus)
  5. Abuse or withdrawal from alcohol, drugs, tobacco

**Psychosocial/Environmental?**
- a. Home assessment/safety
- b. Supports: family involvement/friends/alone
- c. ADLs and AIDLs