

Altered Mental Status

Common Differential:

- Metabolic (measurable value)
 - Low glucose
 - Low thiamine
 - High BUN
 - Hypercapnic
 - Thyroid
 - Other electrolyte abnormalities (Na, Ca, Billi)
- Hypertensive
- Hepatic (ammonia is arguably a poor surrogate for toxin buildup)
- Poor brain perfusion
 - Anemia
 - Hypotension
 - Poor oxygenation
 - Arrhythmia
- Acid/Base
 - DKA / HHNK coma
- Infection
 - Sepsis (Pneumonia, UTI)
 - Encephalitis
- Neuro causes
 - Stroke/TIA
 - Seizure
- Toxins
 - Alcohol
- Medications toxicity
 - Anti-cholinergic (anti-histamines, anti-depressants)
 - Pain meds (opioids)
 - Benzos, sleeping agents
 - Tylenol, aspirin
- Delirium

Emergent work up:

- Assess ABCs and stabilize. Intubate if needed
- Vitals stable?
- Physical exam:
 - Sternal rub
 - Check pupils
 - Aspirating?
 - Cardiac rate/rhythm, murmur
 - Pulmonary
 - Breathing pattern
 - “Heavy breathing” → Sepsis or DKA (compensatory respiratory alkalosis)
 - Slow → possible hypercapnic state
 - Abdominal masses / distention, acute abdomen
 - Skin – bleeding, rashes, wounds
- Work up
 - Lab work
 - POC glucose
 - CBC, CMP
 - Consider: ABG, TSH, UA, troponin
 - Consider: Blood and urine cultures
 - Medication review
 - EKG
 - Imaging: CXR, CT head wo contrast
 - Echocardiogram
- Quick treatments to consider
 - Narcan
 - Thiamine
 - Fluids
 - BiPAP/intubation

Garg's
Simple Medicine
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