

APAGBI SURVEY AND AUDIT SUB-COMMITTEE

Template Report for Surveys of the APA Membership

Survey Title: Checking Pregnancy in children before surgery.

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Brief Description of Purpose:

Surgical procedures carried out on pregnant women could result in harm to the foetus. In April 2010, the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) produced a Rapid Response Report about checking pregnancy before surgery. A search of the National Reporting & Learning System (NRLS) database over a 6-year period had revealed 42 incidents where the pregnancy status of females had not been documented before a planned procedure and 3 of these resulted in spontaneous abortion. In addition, there were 12 other claims from litigation data in which pregnancy checks were not made.

In 2003, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) produced guidelines for preoperative testing. In relation to pregnancy status it recommended that all female patients of childbearing age be asked if there was a possibility that they might be pregnant. If pregnancy was a possibility then they should be offered a pregnancy test having obtained informed consent. The NICE guidelines did not specify an age range for women of childbearing age, but some organisations interpreted this as 12-55 years. The NPSA's 2010 RRR highlighted the inconsistent approach of NHS organisations to checking and documenting pregnancy status in all female patients.

There are special difficulties in establishing pregnancy status in the 12-18 year age group. Patients within this age range may deny the possibility of pregnancy particularly in the presence of their parents – either because of embarrassment or fear of recrimination, sexual activity being illegal under the age of 16. Even if it is considered appropriate to obtain consent without the knowledge of the parents, from a female under 16 years of age who is judged to be competent, there is a risk that the relationship between health care staff and the parents is undermined if the test is positive.

In our hospital we conducted an initial survey of 50 female patients between the age of 12 and 18 years undergoing planned surgery. Only 38 (68%) had evidence that pregnancy status had been considered.

In view of this and the aforementioned difficulties of establishing the pregnancy status of this age group we conducted a national survey of practice throughout the UK.

Category of Membership Surveyed: (e.g. all, home, overseas, linkmen, trainee)

A questionnaire using SurveyMonkey was sent to 159 APA linkmen in the UK.

Dates of Survey: October 21st 2010 to April 8th 2011.

Number of Responses: 56 (35% response rate).

Outline Findings of Survey:

The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions as follows:

**Question 1: Are you aware of the NICE guidelines for preoperative pregnancy testing?
YES/NO**

Question 2: In your hospital/institution, is there a system for the documentation of the pregnancy status of females under 18 years of age? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Question 3: Where is the information recorded? CASE NOTES/CONSENT FORM/DON'T KNOW/OTHER

**Question 4: Is the date of menarche (starting periods) recorded?
ALWAYS/SOMETIMES/NEVER/DON'T KNOW**

**Question 5: Is the date of the last menstrual period recorded?
ALWAYS/SOMETIMES/NEVER/DON'T KNOW**

**Question 6: Are menstruant females under the age of 18 asked whether they could be pregnant?
ALWAYS/SOMETIMES/NEVER/DON'T KNOW**

**Question 7: Are patients asked in front of their parent(s) or separately?
In front of the parent(s)/Separately/Variable/Don't know**

**Question 8: Who is responsible for checking the patient's pregnancy status?
A member of the nursing staff/A junior doctor during the clerking /the doctor taking consent for the procedure/Don't know**

Question 9: Is there a lower age limit below which pregnancy is regarded as unlikely or impossible?

YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

If "YES", what is this age limit and how was this established?

Question 10: Does your institution use "blanket" pregnancy testing?

YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Question 11: If "YES" to Qu 10, is written consent obtained from the: Patient? /Parents?

Question 12: Have there been any adverse incidents in your institution, of patients under the age of 18 undergoing surgery whilst pregnant? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Question 13: Is there a system for reporting of incidents where pregnancy checks have not happened within your hospital? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Question 14: Any additional (free text) comments.

Summary of results: 40% of respondents were not aware of NICE guidelines; 30% of respondents commented that there was no system for the documentation of pregnancy in their hospital (and another 32% of respondents did not know); 40% of respondents did not know where the information was recorded.

Only 50% of respondents said that patients were asked if their periods had started but even this was patchy (always = 5%; usually = 12% and occasionally = 34%). 68% of respondents said that the LMP was recorded but again the frequency within this group was very variable (always = 11%; usually = 16% and occasionally = 41%). 77% of respondents said that patients were always (11%), usually (25%) or occasionally (41%) asked whether they could be pregnant. There was lack of clarity about whose responsibility it is to check the patient's pregnancy status with 40% of respondents not knowing, 31% believing that it is the responsibility of the nursing staff and only 4% believing that it was the responsibility of the doctor taking consent for the procedure.

Nearly 60% of respondents did not know the age below which pregnancy had, in their hospital been deemed as unlikely or impossible. Only one respondent (1.8%) replied that there is "blanket" pregnancy testing in their hospital and written consent is obtained for this. 80% of respondents said that pregnancy testing is not performed and 18% did not know. There were no known adverse incidents of patients under 18 years of age undergoing surgery while pregnant and almost 20% of respondents said that there was no

system in place in their hospital for reporting when no pregnancy checks had taken place and a further 41% did not know.

Our principal conclusion is that the checking of pregnancy status in girls between 12 and 18 years of age is extremely variable. The majority of respondents who made free text comments expressed concerns about the inconsistency of the process and its proper documentation in their hospital. One respondent wrote of the balance between the benefits and risks of pregnancy testing.

Procedures for checking pregnancy status during radiological investigations are well established but they are less robust for patients undergoing surgical procedures. Many, perhaps most female patients of childbearing age are not aware of the potential hazards to the foetus of anaesthesia and surgery. The incidence of previously undiagnosed pregnancy in the 12-18 age group undergoing elective surgery is likely to be very low so there has to be a balance between the benefit to the pregnant girl and her unborn child in adopting a universal checking policy and the potential risk to the doctor/patient/parent relationship.

Follow up Actions:

We have gone on to conduct a service improvement project. Firstly the medical and nursing staff on the Paediatric wards in the trust have been consulted on:

- How, when & by whom pregnancy status should be established
- How & where it should be recorded
- What risks patients are informed of when deciding whether to disclose pregnancy status
- Whether girls should be offered urinary pregnancy testing
- Invitation of ideas on how to improve the process

The data has been collected with 140 completed survey questionnaires. There appears to be widespread concern about the inconsistency and relative informality of the checking process and there is good support for the implementation of better guidelines and/or a policy. We are about to embark on discussions within our trust about ways to improve patient information, ways to improve staff awareness, possible changes to the local consent form and finally on ways to improve the pre-procedure documentation of the pregnancy status of female patients under 18 years of age who have started menstruating.

Intended Publication/Presentation:

This is undecided but in order to get to a wide audience we will consider either the AAGBI annual congress in September 2011 or a submission to the journal Pediatric Anesthesia.

Useful links:

<http://www.bmj.com/content/341/bmj.c3402.full>

www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/checkingpregnancy

www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/Preop_Fullguideline.pdf

Other Comments:

Date Submitted to Survey Lead: 21.04.11

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