

Opiate withdrawal history and physical examination

Opiate withdrawal symptoms peak between 36-72 hours. Symptoms run their course in 5-7 days though craving continues for some time.

History

1. What substance was being used?
2. When was it last taken?
3. Ask about craving
4. Joint pains? Muscle aches/twitching? Headache?
5. Any abdominal cramps? Nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea?
6. Hot and cold flushes?
7. Have you been sneezing?
8. Any sleep problems? (restless sleep)
9. Ask if the patient has been feeling agitated or anxious

Physical examination

1. Check B.P., pulse, temperature and respiratory rate (all increased in withdrawal)
2. Run your hand over patients palm and arm. Wet sweaty palms and piloerection commonly seen.
3. Look for signs of IV drug use
4. Comment if the patient is shaking or yawning
5. Check for lacrimation, rhinorrhoea and dilated pupils
6. CVS examination concentrating on the presence or absence of murmurs.
7. Signs of liver failure

Tests

1. Full blood count, LFTs, U&Es
2. Hepatitis screen and HIV test after counselling the patients
3. Urine drug screen.
4. ECG and chest X-Ray. Echo if any cardiac murmurs.
5. Tests for sexually transmitted disease if patient has been promiscuous and has not been taking precautions.

Treatment

1. Supportive treatment
2. Clonidine to help with physical symptoms
3. Buprenorphine
4. Methadone detoxification