



HOSPITAL PROTOCOLS

Hospital Guidelines for CRPS/RSD Patients. Handle with Sensitivity!

Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS), formerly known as Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy (RSD), is a neuro-inflammatory condition that disrupts the functioning of the nervous and immune systems. This disruption leads to constant pain signals being sent to the brain. CRPS is characterized by severe burning pain, pathological changes in the bones and skin, excessive sweating, tissue swelling, and heightened sensitivity to touch. The McGill Pain Scale rates CRPS higher than the pain experienced during childbirth, amputation, and cancer. Individuals with CRPS have extraordinary sensitivity to specific stimuli, including touch, movement, vibrations, noise, light, and needle sticks.

Tips for Patients:

- Carry a copy of WARRIORS of CRPS Hospital Protocols, along with a "CRPS Medical Alert" card, to validate your condition and educate healthcare practitioners.
- Keep your health insurance information readily available.
- Maintain a list of all your allergies, medical conditions, and treating physicians.
- Have a comprehensive list of your medications, including prescribed drugs, over-the-counter medications, and specialty compounded medications, as some may not be on the hospital's formulary. Include dosages and frequencies.
- Maintain a list of any medical devices or implants you have, such as spinal cord stimulators, intrathecal pain pumps, implantable cardioverter defibrillators, pacemakers, cardiac stents, etc.
- Be patient when educating others about CRPS.
- Consider obtaining a letter from your doctor or pain specialist detailing the conditions you are being treated for and your medical regimen.
- Request that hospital staff always ask for permission before touching you.
- When possible, ask for a quiet area with controlled temperature and lighting to minimize triggers (such as allodynia). Wearing dark sunglasses may help.
- Request hypoallergenic items, such as sheets, blankets, gowns, cardiac monitoring EKG leads, tape, soap, and cream, to minimize skin sensitivity (allodynia).

Tips for Medical Professionals:

- When possible, minimize frequent needle sticks or injections, as CRPS can heighten sensitivity to pain (hyperalgesia).
- If available, consider obtaining blood from a PICC site instead of using a venous puncture technique.
- Use the smallest gauge needle (butterfly, if possible) and topical numbing cream (e.g., EMLA, Synera, Lidocaine) when possible, as patients with CRPS often have thin and fragile veins.
- When obtaining blood work, try to do so during IV insertion to minimize additional trauma.

- Some patients respond better to slower infusion rates and carefully controlled IV fluid temperatures.
- Hypoallergenic materials may be necessary to accommodate allodynia.
- Frequent linen changes may be needed for patients with hyperhidrosis (increased sweating).
- Avoid using ice on CRPS-affected limbs to prevent nerve damage.
- Patients may not tolerate hospital socks.
- Identify affected limbs to avoid touching them during blood draws, vital sign measurements, or when changing sheets/blankets.
- Assess for possible limb atrophy (skin, muscles, and bone weakness) and provide adaptive equipment and mobility aids before moving or transporting the patient.
- Minimize sudden movements and bumps during patient movement/transportation, as they can increase dysesthesia (creepy, crawly sensation to touch), dystonic movements (abnormal movements, involuntary muscle spasms), and allodynia.
- In cases of minor or major injuries or surgeries, additional pain management plans should be considered, and intravenous ketamine may be necessary.
- Remember that CRPS is a genuine medical condition that requires support, education, and a comprehensive plan of action.



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