



The Clinical Evaluation of ED Patients with Suspected Spinal Cord Illness or Injury

Learning Objectives

- Review the optimal clinical evaluation, diagnostic testing, and treatment of Emergency Department patients with head trauma and suspected spinal cord illness or injury.
- Discuss procedures and protocols that will assist the emergency physician in providing care to these critically ill and injured patients.

Background

One of the critical requirements of the emergency physician is to be able to efficiently diagnose and effectively treat patients who present to the Emergency Department with suspected spinal cord illness or injury. This lecture will highlight two specific skills that are part of this overall treatment strategy, the physical exam and diagnostic evaluation of these patients and the use of a protocol that includes antibiotics, antivirals, steroids and other therapies in the management of patients with suspected spinal cord illness or injury.

In this Brain Injury Course, FERNE would like to stress the use of specific procedures and protocols in managing patients with neurological illness and injury. In effect, the goal is to take a surgeon's approach to treating medical problems in the Emergency Department, including complications related to spinal cord illness and injury.

Key Clinical Questions

- What are the clinical signs and symptoms of patients who have spinal cord illness or injury?
- How should patients with a suspected spinal cord deficit be managed?
- What are the roles for the following therapies in the setting of suspected spinal cord pathology: antibiotics, antivirals, steroids, fluid infusions, pressors, and other neuroprotectants therapies?

Featured Procedures or Protocols

- Diagnostic protocol using the physical exam, CT and MRI neuroimaging, and lumbar puncture in the evaluation of ED patients with suspected spinal cord illness or injury.
- Treatment protocol utilizing antibiotics, antivirals, steroids and other therapies in the management of patients with suspected spinal cord illness or injury.

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