Clinical Practice Statement

Should Antiemetics be Given Prophylactically with Intravenous Opioids While Treating Acute Pain in the Emergency Department? (Reviewed/Updated from 2010)

Co-Chairs: Steve Rosenbaum, MD FAAEM
Michael Abraham, MD FAAEM
Authors: Kristin D. Rowland, MD (AAEM/RSA)
Justin Fuehrer, DO (AAEM/Fellow-in-Training)
Sergey M. Motov, MD FAAEM

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Reviewers: Eric Bruno, MD FAAEM
Robert Sherwin, MD FAAEM

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Recommendation
Antiemetics are not indicated for routine use with intravenous opioids in treating acute pain in the ED. The potential benefit from administering prophylactic antiemetics to all patients receiving opioids is small at best, and this benefit is outweighed by potentially undesirable additive sedation and extrapyramidal side effects.

Introduction
Parenteral opioids are the most common analgesics used in the emergency department (ED) for relief of acute pain. Gastrointestinal side effects such as nausea and vomiting are common following opioid analgesia in long-term therapy for malignant and chronic pain and are considered a limiting factor in effective pain therapy.1 Despite the lack of clear and supporting evidence, it has been common practice to prophylactically use antiemetics when administering intravenous opioids in treating acute pain in the ED. The recent literature is challenging this concept and advocating against the prophylactic administration of antiemetics in the ED, as the incidence of vomiting associated with opioid administration for acute pain is low. Given concerns for the additive sedative and extrapyramidal effects of many anti-emetics when co-administered with opioids, the routine use of prophylactic antiemetics likely causes far more adverse effects.
relative to episodes of vomiting prevented. The existing research is limited in terms of the antiemetics used (mostly metoclopramide), however more recent studies have evaluated ondansetron as well. Other studies have found certain risk factors that are associated with a higher incidence of nausea and vomiting after opioid administration. The overwhelming evidence shows a low incidence of nausea and vomiting after administration of opioid analgesics in the ED.

Executive Summary
A structured review was performed of the medical literature using PubMed. Based on this review, 13 unique articles were identified.

Talbot et al. evaluated the incidence of nausea and vomiting after morphine and pethidine (meperidine) analgesia in a prospective, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial. Patients were further randomized to receive either metoclopramide or normal saline in addition to either morphine or pethidine. Out of 122 patients, 7 patients (5.7%) experienced nausea and 1 patient (0.8%) had vomiting. There was no statistical significance in incidence of nausea and vomiting between treatment groups. However, of those receiving metoclopramide, 7.9% had side effects unrelated to nausea and vomiting versus 3.4% in the normal saline group. These findings showed metoclopramide administration increased adverse effects, such as dystonic reaction, vertigo, dizziness, restlessness, and drowsiness, without affecting the rate of nausea and vomiting.

Paoloni et al. designed a prospective observational study in 205 ED patients in an effort to evaluate the rate of vomiting before and after administration an intravenous opiate analgesia at 30 and 60 minutes. The results showed a cumulative incidence of vomiting of 1.5% at 30 minutes and 2.4% at 60 minutes.

Bradshaw and colleagues conducted a randomized controlled trial comparing the incidence of nausea and vomiting in 259 patients with acute pain treated with morphine along with prophylactic metoclopramide or placebo. The results showed the overall incidence of nausea and vomiting was 2.7% in the whole study population, 1.6% in the metoclopramide group, and 3.7% in the placebo group without statistical significance.

Yeoh and colleagues evaluated the value of an educational initiative designed to reduce the prophylactic use of metoclopramide with initial morphine dose by conducting a pre-and post-intervention trial. The results showed a significant reduction of the proportion of patients receiving metoclopramide from 22.6% to 4.1% (P<0.001), although incidence of nausea and vomiting after receiving morphine was not recorded.
Culver and colleagues conducted a prospective observational study to evaluate the efficacy of IV ondansetron in preventing nausea and vomiting after opioid administration in the ED. The study evaluated nausea levels at baseline, 5 minutes, and 30 minutes after opioid administration with and without ondansetron. Out of 133 patients, incidence of nausea after 30 minutes was 15.9% in the ondansetron and opioid group, and 4.6% in the opioid only group (p = 0.047).

Bounes and colleagues conducted a prospective, observational, pharmaco-epidemiological international cohort study to identify potential risk factors for adverse effects after morphine administration in 1128 patients. The results showed that morphine-related nausea and vomiting was seen more often in patients with a history of travel illness (adjusted OR 1.7, CI 1.01-2.86) and in patients with a history of morphine-induced nausea or vomiting (adjusted OR 3.86, CI 2.29-6.51).

Ishihara and colleagues conducted a multi-institutional retrospective study on 619 hospitalized patients receiving oral opioid analgesics and analyzed the incidence of opioid-induced side effects. This included looking at the incidence of side effects when premedicated with dopamine D2 blockers such as metoclopramide, promethazine, and prochlorperazine. Results showed that premedication with dopamine D2 blockers was not sufficient to prevent nausea or vomiting.

Giusti and colleagues conducted a web-based cross-sectional national survey comprised of an 11 item survey asking specific questions regarding the prophylactic use of antiemetics for prevention of opioid-induced nausea and vomiting. Results showed that 45% of physicians prescribed prophylactic antiemetics at the beginning of opioid prescription, while 81% prescribed antiemetics at the occurrence of opioid-induced nausea or vomiting.

Nicholson wrote a review paper regarding the incidence of opioid induced nausea and/or vomiting as well as recommendations regarding the possible use of prophylactic antiemetics to prevent opioid-induced nausea and/or vomiting. In this article, it was recommended that prophylactic antiemetics only be used in those at high risk for opioid-induced nausea and/or vomiting.

**Conclusion**

Antiemetics are not indicated for routine use with intravenous opioids in treating acute pain in the ED. The potential benefit from administering prophylactic antiemetics to all patients receiving opioids is small at best, and this benefit is outweighed by potentially undesirable additive sedation and extrapyramidal side effects.
effects. Nausea and vomiting are infrequent after opioid use, however there is a slightly higher incidence of these adverse effects in patients with a history of nausea and vomiting after opioid administration and in patients with a history of travel sickness. Therefore, questioning patients regarding any history of nausea and vomiting after opioid administration, or history of travel sickness, is indicated and prophylactic antiemetics considered in patients with these risk factors.

References


