

# 2021 Best Research Poster Award



## Can the Alcohol Withdrawal Scale be Applied to Post-operative Patients?

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### INTRODUCTION

Assessment scales are commonly used to diagnose and treat alcohol withdrawal syndrome (AWS) in acute hospitals, although they have only been validated for use in detoxification facilities. There is significant overlap between the symptoms and signs of AWS and other clinical presentations, including systemic inflammatory response syndrome (SIRS) and the physiological response to surgery. This may lead to both over-diagnosis and inappropriate treatment of AWS. This study sought to determine the false-positive rate for the commonly used Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment for Alcohol-Revised (CIWA-Ar) among post-operative patients.

### METHOD

This was a prospective study of patients undergoing major abdominal surgery at University Hospital Geelong. Patients were recruited who were NOT at risk of alcohol dependency (using the World Health Organisation Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test). Patients were assessed for AWS using the CIWA-Ar day one post-operatively with a false positive measured as a CIWA-Ar  $\geq 8$ .

### WHAT IS THE CIWA-AR?

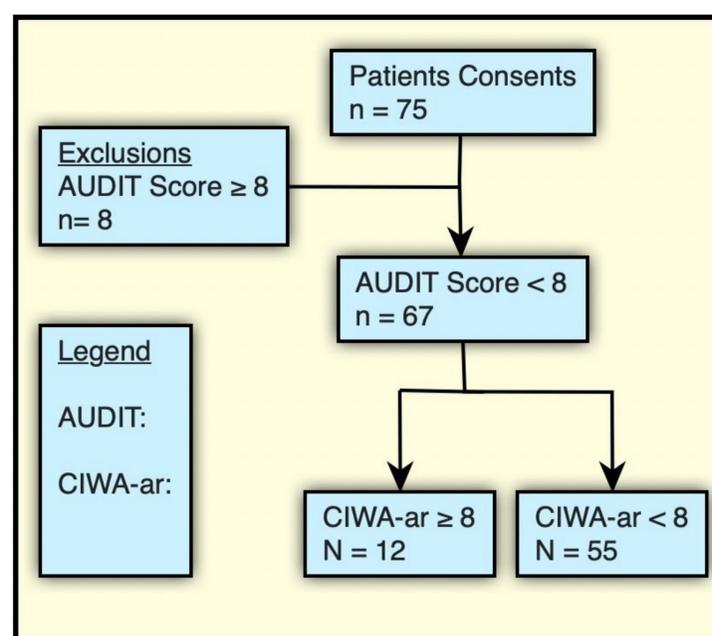
Nausea and Vomiting 1-7	Tactile Disturbances 1-7
Tremor 1-7	Visual Disturbances 1-7
Sweats 1-7	Headache / Fullness 1-7
Anxiety 1-7	Orientation 1-4
Agitation 1-7	Total out of 60

### REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank all the interns and residents involved in data collection for this project across multiple surgical units.

### RESULTS

A total of 67 patients were included in the study. There were 31 (46 %) men and 36 women. Their median age was 52 years (range 27 to 85). Thirty-six (52%) of patients underwent elective procedures, and 31 were emergencies. Twelve of the 67 patients (18%) had CIWA-Ar scores  $\geq 8$ .



### CONCLUSION

In the early post-operative period, the CIWA-Ar tool over-diagnoses AWS in 18% of patients. These false positives could lead to delayed treatment of serious underlying conditions. We call for caution in the use of alcohol withdrawal scales in the acute hospital setting.

### WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The project team are currently working on a more appropriate scale for use in the post operative setting.