Taking Blood Pressure

Problem

Taking blood pressure measures has become so routine that it is easy to forget the importance of the skill and knowledge required to obtain an accurate reading. However, accurate measurements are essential for the correct interventions and treatments for the patient. Nurses need to remind themselves about the essential components that make for accurate blood pressure readings.

Consequence

Intervention and treatments such as medication selection and dosage, fluid management, and activity level are frequently determined based on blood pressure measurements. Inaccurate readings could lead to errors in treatment, and patient safety may be compromised.

Solution

Here are some suggested steps to take to prevent / avoid this problem.

- Inspect the sphygmomanometer to make sure that the bulb is free from holes, that the bladder inflates and that the cuff can be secured tightly to the arm.

- Ensure the right size of cuff is being used; a cuff that is too small may produce falsely high readings.

- Inspect the stethoscope to ensure it is working properly.

- Remember that blood pressure fluctuates and does not remain constant at an given time; so it is normal to obtain variable readings each time the blood pressure is taken.

- Blood pressure readings are affected by body positioning, fluid intake, body temperature, stress, age, weight, smoking, alcohol consumption and ethnicity.

- Know the patient’s history and why blood pressure monitoring is necessary.

- Select the best site to obtain blood pressure – avoid IV site arms, breast surgery side arms and casted areas.
• Discuss the procedure with the patient.

• Palpate the pulse at the blood pressure cuff site.

• Follow routine process for inflating the cuff to higher than past readings.

• Deflate the cuff slowly! Listen for the first sound, and then the last sound.

• Discuss the blood pressure readings with the patient and/or the primary care provider.

References

*Avoiding Common Nursing Errors*, Lisa Marcucci, MD, Editor, Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2010.

**Note:** A narrated e-Learning module of this Nugget is available at LearningNurse.com.