Screening Practices for Non-Accidental Trauma

Jonathan I. Groner MD

Objectives

• Identify patients who have increased risk for non-accidental trauma
• Integrate strategies to combat implicit bias in non-accidental trauma
• Integrate knowledge of non-accidental trauma into a usable screening practice

Case Study 1

• 18 month old male
• Presents to emergency department with burn to left hand
• Partial thickness burns on digits
• Mom reports that injury occurred under the care of “father”
• Father reports that injury occurred when he was vacuuming – “accidentally” vacuumed child’s hand causing injury

Case Study 2

• 6 month old infant
• Parents call 911 after infant fell from changing table
• Swelling noted on occiput
• Decreased neurologic status, required intubation
• No other injuries identified on exam
• Father is an anesthesiologist at the hospital
Medical Decision Making

Which of these 2 cases:
• Needs a social work consult?
• Needs a referral to the “CAT team?”
• Needs a skeletal survey?
• Is suspicious for child abuse?

Which of these mechanisms is the leading killer of children?
• Pedestrian trauma
• Overlay (asphyxiation)
• Motor vehicle crash
• Drowning
• Child Abuse

NCH registry data 2005-2014 (10 years)

Trauma deaths by mechanism:
• Child abuse = 58
• Motor vehicle crash = 37
• Drowning = 28
• Overlay = 27
• Pedestrian = 17

95% of child abuse deaths are < 5 yrs

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AVERAGE AGE

Child Abuse defined

• Injury inflicted upon a child by an adult caregiver
• Injury can be mental or physical
• Physical injury can be from trauma (thermal, blunt, or penetrating tissue injury from kinetic energy) or rare non-trauma mechanisms
• Caregiver can be parent, relative, or non-related caregiver (babysitter, boyfriend)
• Also called non-accidental trauma, child maltreatment
• We are focusing on physical injury from trauma

Child Abuse: the numbers (USA)

• 3,600,000 reports of possible abuse in 2014
• 702,000 were determined to be victims of abuse or neglect
• 119,517 were the victims of physical abuse
• 1580 children died as a result of abuse or neglect
• (compare to 760 MVC deaths and 604 pedestrian deaths age < 18 in 2014)
Child Abuse is difficult to diagnose…

Child Abuse can mimic:
- Coagulopathy ("easy bruising")
- Metabolic disease ("bone disease" causing fractures)
- CNS disorders (seizures)
- Dermatologic disease ("skin rashes")
- Infection (sepsis due to bowel perforation)

…and almost every patient is too young to give a history
…and parents will "ED shop" to avoid detection

History and Injury often do not match

Risk of abuse in infants and toddlers with lower extremity trauma (study)
5 year review of 5500 admitted trauma patients at a single pediatric trauma center for any injury:

- Among children ≥ 18 months, 2% were abused
- Among children < 18 months, 32% were abused

Risk of abuse in infants and toddlers with lower extremity trauma

- Among children < 18 months with any lower extremity injury, 66% were abused
- Among children < 18 months with a lower extremity fracture, 74% were abused

>90% of all abuse cases occur by age 3
Lower extremity soft tissue injury

4 month old with femur fracture

2 month old with femur fracture

1 month old with femur fracture

Medically Fragile Children: Higher Risk?

NICU grads vs. “well babies:” a sibling comparison
- Infants from a Level IV NICU were compared to non-NICU siblings
- Statistical modeling to control for confounding variables
- Risk of child abuse was particularly high during the first year of a NICU infant’s life
- Risk of child abuse was also high for infants in families with other abuse risk factors


Medically Fragile Children: Higher Risk?
- Caregiving burden is significant for some NICU graduates (g-tubes, feeding pumps, monitors, etc.)
- Caregiving burden was associated primarily with an increased risk of child welfare reporting during the first few months to first year of life, after which risk was similar to NICU graduates without caregiving burden
- Caregiving burden effects were potentiated by having three or more siblings in the family
Medically Fragile Children: Higher Risk?

- A history of prior child welfare reports predicted very high risk, regardless of caregiving burden.
- Young maternal age increased risk.
- Caregiving burden may increase the risk of child abuse in infants who are NICU graduates.

Risch EC, Owora A, Nandakal R, Chaffin M, Bonner BL. Child Abuse Negl. 2013 Dec;37(12):1114-21

Factitious disorder by proxy

- Often presents as a bizarre medical illness:
  - Renal failure in a healthy child (parents contaminated blood samples with urine)
  - Severe GERD refractory to anti-reflux procedures (parent faked vomiting)
  - "familial" SIDS (multiple homicides by parents)
- May occasionally present as a trauma:
  - Pharyngeal injury (parents blamed radiology)
  - Rectal trauma causing GI bleeding
  - Head trauma causing hearing loss or seizures

Factitious disorder by proxy

- Persistent illness in a child that cannot be explained on a medical basis
- Symptoms improve when child is removed from caregivers
- Long delay from onset of symptoms to diagnosis
- Mothers are most often perpetrator
- Mothers often have history of abuse or Munchausen symptoms (66%)
- Medical training is common among perpetrators (55% worked in or studied health care)

Factitious disorder by proxy

- Summary:
  - Bizarre injuries that can’t be explained
  - Bizarre illnesses that can’t be explained
  - Prolonged hospitalizations common
  - Parents work in health care or very are knowledgeable about health care
  - Parents sometimes break social norms (“hang out” at nurses station, “move in” to patient’s room)
Child abuse and traumatic brain injury

- Child abuse should be in the “top tier” of the differential diagnosis for any infant who is brought to the ED in a comatose state from home
- Child abuse must also be considered in an otherwise healthy infant with new onset seizures

ED screening for child abuse: WHO SCREENS?

- Survey of 72 children’s hospitals in USA
- All hospitals had a specific individual or team that specializes in child abuse pediatrics
- Only 13% of hospitals reported that a standardized screening tool was deployed to detect child abuse

**WHY SCREEN?**

1. Earlier detection
2. Reduce bias

**Early Detection Saves Lives**

- Because Mortality increases as abuse-related injury episodes increase

**Recurrent episodes of NAT in children**

- Data source: Ohio State Trauma Registry
- Patients with a single episode of NAT and recurrent episodes of NAT (“rNAT”) were identified by matching date of birth, race, and sex between records of patients younger than 16 years between 2000 and 2010
- A total of 1,572 patients of NAT were identified, with 53 patients meeting criteria for rNAT

**Recurrent episodes of NAT in children**

- Compared with patients with single-episode NAT, patients with rNAT were:
  - more commonly male (66% vs. 52%, p = 0.05)
  - were white (83% vs. 65%, p = 0.02)
  - were more likely to be evaluated at a pediatric trauma center (87% vs. 69%, p = 0.008)
  - had higher mortality (24.5% vs. 9.9%, p = 0.002).
Recurrent episodes of NAT in children

- Compared with rNAT patients who did not die, those who died with rNAT had:
  - a longer interval from initial episode to second episode
  - were older during their second episode
- At initial presentation, lower-extremity fractures (p = 0.09) and liver injuries (p = 0.06) were reported more commonly in nonsurvivors of rNAT.

Recurrent episodes of NAT in children

- Mortality is significantly higher in children who experience rNAT.
- It is critically important to effectively intervene with appropriate resources and follow-up after a child’s initial episode of NAT to prevent a future catastrophic episode.

Decisions to evaluate for abuse are subject to bias

- Retrospective study of 173 children with abusive head trauma (AHT)
- 54 (31%) were seen after injury but diagnosis was missed
- AHT was more likely to be missed in very young white children with intact families
- AHT also likely to be missed in children without respiratory compromise or seizures

How do you screen for abuse?

- National survey of 72 children’s hospitals
- 9 respondents reported using a standardized tool
- 5 respondents provided the length of the tool
  - 2 tools were 1 question only
  - 1 tool was three questions
  - 1 tool was twelve questions
  - 1 tool was fifteen questions

What are the barriers to screening?

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<th>Table 3: Perceived barriers to implementation of a standardized tool to screen for child physical abuse</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived barriers</td>
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<td>Lack of time for development of a screening policy</td>
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<td>Do not feel such a tool is necessary</td>
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<td>Lack of time for completion of a screening tool</td>
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<td>Lack of support from managers and hospital board</td>
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<td>Lack of understanding and/or awareness of child abuse</td>
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<td>Lack of community resources</td>
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<td>Difficulty of communicating with parents/guardians in the case of suspected abuse</td>
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<td>No child abuse pediatrics or team available</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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Respondents were given the opportunity to describe additional barriers to implementation of a tool for screening for child physical abuse. The most common barrier (38%, n = 14) noted was lack of a validated, effective screening technique for abuse.
How do you screen in a busy ED?

• “We can’t screen every child who walks through the doors of the ED.”
• Our ED/urgent care (main campus) handles about 80,000 visits per year.
• How do we pick the patients who are at highest risk?

Recommendations for screening

Develop a tool that:
• Is easy to use
• Appears automatically in the chart when a child needs to be screened
• Does not require any extra time for ED team
• Screens without bias due to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or place of residence

How we do it…

The NCH child abuse screen seeks two pieces of information:
1. Is the child < 5 years old? (EHR can determine this)
2. Was the child injured inside a home? (answered by physician)
   • If “yes,” then an automatic notification is sent to the child abuse team
   • The abuse team will review the chart and decide if a face to face visit is required

Does it work?

A standard screening protocol

• Will increase the overall pool of potential child abuse victims
• But will identify many more children with child abuse
• In other words:
  – More work for your team
  – More cases detected
  – More lives saved
Detecting Abuse: **experience matters**

- Data Source: 2012 Nationwide Emergency Department Sample (NEDS)
- National estimates of ED visits for children<10 years with both definitive and suggestive maltreatment

**Outcomes**

- admission/transfer ratios for children<10 years
- Screening ratios by skeletal surveys and head computed tomography (CT) for children<2 years with suspected physical abuse
- Hospitals with low, medium, and high pediatric ED volumes were compared

**Experience Matters**

- high volume hospitals had a significantly higher adjusted odds ratio (AOR) of admission/transfer among definitive cases when compared with low volume hospitals
- medium volume hospitals had a higher odds of admission/transfer among suggestive cases when compared with low volume hospitals

**National Abuse estimates**

- The 2012 national estimate of U.S. ED visits (children<10 years) with definitive maltreatment is 14,457 (95% CI: 11,987–16,928)
- Suggestive child maltreatment was seen in an additional 103,392 (95% CI: 90,803–115,981) pediatric ED visits

**Experience Matters**

- high volume hospitals reported skeletal surveys (age<2 years) significantly more often than low volume hospitals
- the AORs for head CT did not differ by hospital volume.

**Case Study 1**

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Case Study 2

- 22 month old toddler
- Mom reports that toddler was taking a bath, older child also in tub, accidentally turned hot water on toddler’s hands
- She immediately applied cold towels and brought child to emergency department

Case Study 3: Does this child need screening?

- 4 year old female
- Brought to ED for abdominal pain, anorexia, vomiting
- History and exam suggests possible appendicitis
- Ultrasound of the abdomen reveals normal appendix but ascites
- CT scan of the abdomen obtained
Conclusions

• Child abuse is a unique disease in that the caregivers do NOT want you to detect it
• Child abuse can be difficult to detect in the ED:
  – Injuries may be subtle or confusing
  – Child may visit several different emergency rooms
  – Story may be inconsistent
  – History may not be compatible with injuries

Conclusions

• Child Abuse is a leading cause of trauma deaths
  – Kills more children than motor vehicle crashes
• A simple screening tool can reduce bias, improving detection of child abuse cases
• A simple screening process can result in earlier detection of child abuse cases
• Screening has the potential to prevent harm and save lives

References