

# Searching for the Cause of Delirium

Delirium Symptom list, from Confusion Assessment Method (CAM).  
Suspect if patient presents with both 1. & 2. and either 3. OR 4.

1. Sudden change in mental status
2. Change in behaviour that fluctuates from normal to abnormal over a 24-hr period
3. Difficulty in focusing attention
4. Disorganized thinking and/or altered level of consciousness



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## Hospice Palliative Care Tip of the Month – Nov 2017

*Always consider patient's trajectory in the disease process, wishes and goals of care.  
Discuss treatment with care team and  
Substitute Decision Maker*

Symptom	Assessment	Consideration
<b>Drugs- Toxicity?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· 6 or more medications, especially:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Narcotics, · Anticholinergics · Anticonvulsants</li> <li>· Antipsychotics · Antidepressants</li> </ul> </li> <li>· Age 75 or older receiving a medication for more than 5 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Order drug chemistry</li> </ul>
<b>Electrolyte Disturbances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Gastrointestinal problems</li> <li>· Immobility for more than 1 day in persons previously mobile</li> <li>· Abdominal distention</li> <li>· Decreased number of bowel movements or constipated stool</li> <li>· Decreased fluid intake – dehydration</li> <li>· Decreased food intake, especially bulk</li> <li>· Hyperglycemia / Hypoglycemia/ Hypercalcemia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Initiate appropriate bowel regimen, e.g. enema</li> <li>· Order blood test as indicated</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of Drugs?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Long-term sedatives (including alcohol and sleeping pills) are stopped</li> <li>· Pain drugs are not being given adequately.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Pain management team</li> <li>· Family support/ education</li> </ul>
<b>Infection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Elevation in baseline temperature</li> <li>· History of chronic infection</li> <li>· Recent episode of falling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Appropriate diagnostic tests as indicated: urinalysis, / chest X-ray, / sputum cultures</li> </ul>
<b>Reduced Sensory Input</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· What is the baseline normal sleep pattern?</li> <li>· Psychosocial/Environmental?</li> <li>· Grief/loss</li> <li>· Alteration in personal space</li> <li>· Recently admitted to hospital</li> <li>· Increase or decrease in sensory stimulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Identify causes of sleep disturbances, e.g. medications / pain / environment</li> <li>· Initiate assessment:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· ADLs / Safety / User-friendly environment / Supports</li> <li>· Encourage family involvement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Intracranial</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Changes in chronic illness?                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Diabetes Mellitus · Cancer · Substance Misuse</li> <li>· COPD / Hypoxia · Dementia</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Request appropriate diagnostic tests</li> </ul> <p>(Exacerbation may be accompanied by increased levels of pain and/or decreased functional abilities)</p>
<b>Urinary Problems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· History of incontinence, retention, or indwelling catheter</li> <li>· Signs or symptoms of dehydration, tenting, increased BUN</li> <li>· Decreased urinary output</li> <li>· Taking anticholinergic medication</li> <li>· Abdominal distention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Request in-out catheterization for postvoid residual and/or incontinence assessment, or both.</li> </ul>
<b>Myocardial</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· New disease process?                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Silent MI / CHF</li> <li>· GI bleed</li> <li>· Other</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Request appropriate diagnostic tests (e.g., PE, pulse oximetry, EKG, hemoglobin and hematocrit, chemistry screen, electrolytes, TSH, specific test for cancer detection, CAT)</li> </ul>

### Sources:

- Vancouver Island Health Authority - <http://www.viha.ca/mhas/resources/delirium/>
- Confusion Assessment Method - <https://www.viha.ca/NR/rdonlyres/6121360B-B90F-4EF3-88F6-D50CC4825EE7/0/camshortform.pdf>