Physical Abuse Evaluations

What To Do Before You Call a Child Abuse Expert when physical abuse is suspected in a child under 2 years old

Physical abuse can present as occult injury and normal external examination with or without irritability or lethargy, bruises (especially suspicious if on the face), lacerations or abrasions, burns, fractures, or other presentations.

History
Complete history, including:
____ Review available prior medical records
   (PMD, ED, Inpatient and CPS)
____ Review prior radiologic examinations that were
   performed at referring hospitals
____ Review prior photographs

Determine if forensic evidence will be collected
prior to bathing and removal of clothing.

Physical
Complete physical examination, especially:
____ Palpation of legs, arms, hands, feet and ribs to feel
   for crepitus or deformities
____ Inspection of all body parts and thorough skin exam
____ Complete neurologic examination
____ Oral examination (lip, tongue, buccal) to look for
   frenula tears or dental injuries
____ Auricle exam
____ Inspection of the scalp and hair
____ Genitalia examination

Consults
____ Hospital Social Work
____ Pediatric ophthalmologist; ask for photographs of
   the retina
____ Medical photography when available
____ Request an official radiology reading and
   upload image
____ SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) if concern of
   concurrent sexual abuse ≤96 hrs

Diagnostic tests
Routine tests:
____ CBC with platelets, LFTs, amylase/lipase, PT/PTT, UA
   and stool guaiac
____ UDS/Toxicology
____ Skeletal Survey

Consider:
____ Brain imaging (CT acutely; MRI for follow-up)
____ Forensic Evidence Kit per SANE consult

Documentation
____ History obtained, from whom and to whom
____ Physical findings with drawings and measurements
____ Tests ordered and performed and results
____ Impression: suspected physical abuse

Do not attempt to further interpret findings if
there will be a child abuse consultation.
____ Impact statement to be faxed to CPS or police

Reporting
Call Child Protective Services Hotline
1-800-635-1522 to make a report.
____ Ask them to check if there are other children in the
   home. They must be evaluated by either their PMD
   or the CARE Program.
____ Ask for a scene investigation, if necessary.

As a licensed professional, you are required to
report suspected abuse. A referral to a child
abuse expert is not the same as a Hotline report
to Child Protective Services.

At discharge from the hospital
____ Document head circumference and other growth
   parameters.
____ Make an appointment with a child abuse expert.
____ Make appointments with other sub-specialists
   (possibly orthopedics, neurosurgery and
   ophthalmology) and PMD.
____ Fax script for follow-up skeletal survey to be
   performed 2 weeks from date of incident.

Further information:
Kellogg ND and the Committee on Child Abuse
and Neglect. Evaluation of suspected child
http://aapppolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/
full/pediatrics;119/6/1232

Botash AS. Child Abuse Evaluation and Treatment
for Medical Providers. 2010
http://www.ChildAbuseMD.com

Ann Botash, MD, and the CARE Program for
the Child Abuse Medical Provider Program
www.CHAMPprogram.com
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