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Neonatal Pain Management: Perceptions and Practices in Major Regional Referral Hospitals in Ghana

Accurate assessment and treatment of neonatal pain is crucial to neonate development, and decades of research have indicated that not only do neonates experience pain, but their immature nervous systems make them more sensitive to it. In this study, 126 self-administered, anonymous, multiple-choice surveys were collected across 1 university hospital and 4 regional hospitals, addressing medical providers' opinions on neonatal pain perceptions, practice, and the importance of pain management and treatment in the NICU. Demographic data indicates that 77% of respondents were female, with physicians in training representing 32.6% of the responses, nurses and midwives representing 43.7%, and consulting physicians representing 20%. 40.5% were working between 1-5 years in the NICU. 95.2±3.7% (CI=0.95) believe that neonates are capable of feeling pain and 92.9±4.5% consider pain can cause harm to babies. Only 19.8% use assessment tools to monitor sick babies for pain. While the majority will utilize analgesia after major surgeries (77±7.3%), bedside procedures such as chest tube placement (25.4±7.6%) and lumbar puncture (15.9±6.4%) rarely utilized analgesia, and only 40.5±8.6% admit having analgesia and sedation protocols in the hospital. There is variability of the use of pharmacological and non-pharmacological means for analgesia. 93.7±4.3% identify need for further education of Ghanaian practitioners. Despite recognition among Ghanaian medical providers in NICUs regarding neonates' capacity to experience pain, the absence of policies addressing the management of neonatal pain may lead to suboptimal practice. Implementation of universally accepted assessment tools for acute or prolonged pain and stress, coupled with pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions, holds promise for enhancing neonatal pain management practices. There is an urgent need for national guidelines and evidence-based protocols to address neonatal pain management comprehensively within NICUs.