

Madigan Army Medical Center Referral Guidelines

Heart Block and Bradycardia

Diagnosis/Definition

Palpitations, exercise intolerance, congestive heart failure (CHF), lightheadedness, feeling weak, or syncope due to excessively slow heart rate.

Initial Diagnosis and Management

- History and physical exam: Hemodynamic consequences (e.g., syncope, CHF), rate slowing or atrioventricular (AV) nodal blocking medications.
- 12 lead electrocardiogram.
- PA and LAT CXR.
- Electrolytes, thyroid function.
- Document rhythm during symptoms: 24 hour holter monitor. For infrequent symptoms, an event recorder is performed only after three 24 hour holters (arranged through Cardiology).
- Discontinue rate slowing agents (e.g. digoxin, verapamil, diltiazem, beta blockers, clonidine).
- Syncope: Advise against driving or other activities where syncope would be harmful.
- Asymptomatic bradycardia: generally no treatment required, even for sinus pauses, first degree AV block, or Mobitz type I second degree AV block.
- Symptomatic bradycardia or heart block, or high grade AV block: usually hospitalized for initial management.

Ongoing Management and Objectives

- Elimination of rate slowing or AV nodal blocking agents may improve symptoms.
- Pacemaker implantation may improve symptoms and prevent syncope.

Indications for Specialty Care Referral

- Bradycardiac patients with unexplained syncope should be referred for urgent evaluation.
- Lightheadedness or exercise intolerance with documented bradycardia.
- Documented Mobitz II second degree AV block, high grade AV block, or complete heart block.
- Patients with pacemakers for pacemaker follow up.

Criteria for Return to Primary Care

- Stable patients in whom pacemaker implantation is not required.
- Stable pacemaker patients (except for pacemaker follow up)

Last Review for this Guideline: **January 2010**
Referral Guidelines require review every three years.

Maintained by the Madigan Army Medical Center - Quality Services Division
Clinical Practice and Referral Guidelines Administrator