Clinical Practice Guidelines:
Neurological/Altered level of consciousness

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Purpose | To ensure consistent management of patients with an Altered level of consciousness.
Scope | Applies to all QAS clinical staff.
Author | Clinical Quality & Patient Safety Unit, QAS
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Altered level of consciousness (ALOC) is a clinical feature associated with a broad spectrum of disease processes and often resulting from:

- inadequate delivery of substrate to the brain secondary to poor perfusion/shock; AND/OR
- lack of oxygen or metabolic substrates in the blood stream; AND/OR
- drugs of toxins in the blood stream or CNS affecting cerebral function; AND/OR
- a primary CNS disorder

The differential diagnosis for ALOC is broad. However to assist with diagnosis, it can be classified into two main categories:

**Intracranial pathology (structural):**
- CVA, subarachnoid haemorrhage, intracerebral haemorrhage, diffuse axonal injury, meningitis/encephalitis, post-ictal/status epilepticus, space-occupying injury.

**Extra-cranial pathology (non-structural):**
- Cardiovascular system: arrhythmia
- Metabolic: hyper/hypoglycaemia, hepatic or renal failure, disorders of electrolytes (specifically sodium, potassium, magnesium and calcium)
- Endocrine: thyroid or pituitary disorders
- Toxins: sedative/hypnotics, ETOH, TCAs, anticonvulsants, opiates
- Other: hyper/hypothermia, hypoxia/hypercarbia, infection, factitious, psychiatric[1,2]
Additional information

- ALOC may fluctuate with time and response to treatment.
- Consider the patient's normal level of consciousness (e.g. patients with dementia, acquired brain injury, developmental delay)

Transport to hospital
Pre-notify as appropriate

Signs of life?

Y

Consider:
- Oxygen
- IPPV
- Identify and treat reversible causes
  - arrhythmia
  - hypovolaemia
  - hypoxia
  - hypo/hyperglycaemia
  - overdose
  - hypo/hyperthermia

Manage as per appropriate CPG:
- CPG: Resuscitation – Adult
- CPG: Resuscitation – Paediatric
- CPG: Resuscitation – Newly born

Note: Officers are only to perform procedures for which they have received specific training and authorisation by the QAS.