Expert in my pocket

Respiratory Rate

❶ Preparing for the procedure

a. Perform hand hygiene.

b. Introduce self and obtain verbal consent.

c. Ensure patient position enables observation of chest wall rise and fall.

d. Ensure adequate lighting.

❷ Performing the procedure

a. Cross patients arm over chest OR place hand on patient shoulder.

b. Feel chest rise and fall with hand.

c. Count each inspiration/expiration cycle as one respiration.

d. Using the second hand on a clock, count respirations for a full minute.

e. Note characteristics of respirations including rhythm and depth.

❸ Documentation

a. Document all relevant information.

b. Report abnormal findings.

Background

Approximately 70-80% adverse events are preceded by derangements in vital signs for up to 12 hours with minimal or no intervention from clinicians. This emphasises the need for health professionals to ensure patient safety by careful patient assessment. Recognition and managing the deteriorating patient is one of the Australian National and Quality Health Service Standards developed by the Australian Commission on Quality and Safety in Health care in 2011. Respiratory rate is an important predictor of serious adverse events and as such careful monitoring of rate rhythm and ease of breathing is essential. Respirations are measured in such a way as to not draw the patient's attention to the procedure.

Equipment required

- Hand sanitiser
- Clock with second hand

References

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards [Internet]. 2012 [cited 2014 July 31]. Available from:
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Tollefson J. Clinical Psychomotor Skills: Assessment Tools for Nursing Students. 5th ed. Melbourne: Cengage Learning Australia; 2012.

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