STANDARD PROTOCOLS

LOCAL APPLICATION OF HEAT (HEAT PACKS)

Keywords: Heat pack, local heat therapy, silicone gel packs, warming device, skin appearance, hydrocollator

AIM

- The safe and appropriate use of heat packs at KEMH.

KEY POINTS

1. Do not administer local heat therapy to any patient with:
   - Impaired consciousness / cognition
   - Impaired sensation
   - Restricted movement
   - Impaired circulation e.g. epidural analgesia
   - Elevated temperature
   - Acute inflammatory conditions
   - Language or communication difficulties
   - Haematoma

2. Do not apply local heat therapy:
   - Over wounds
   - With balms or liniments
   - Over radiation sites

3. Hot wet towels are not recommended as standard practice for the application of heat therapy.

4. Hot wet towels are recognised as concurrent therapy with dermatology cream application.

5. Wheat bags / hot water bottles shall not be used at KEMH.

6. Approved silicone gel packs only may be used. Hot packs should be discarded when the outer layer of the pack begins to deteriorate.

7. Hot packs may only be heated in a hospital approved warming device as per manufacturer’s instructions. The warming device must have a thermostatic control.

8. The water temperature in the heating device should be between 71 - 74°C.

9. The warming device must be checked daily for temperature control.

10. The warming device must be emptied and cleaned weekly.

11. Microwave ovens should not be used for heating packs.

PROCEDURE

1. Assess the following prior to commencing heat therapy:
   - Skin appearance - the presence of abrasions, bruises, open areas or oedema.

2. Check the condition of the pack. If it is worn or there is leakage, discard the pack.

3. Enclose the hot pack in a towel or cover. Do not apply directly to the skin.

4. Test the temperature of the pack. It should feel comfortable to the inner wrist.

5. Ensure the woman can reach and activate the call bell and instruct her to call for assistance and remove the pack if it feels too hot or causes discomfort.

6. Do not allow the woman to sit or lie on the hot pack as it may burst causing burns.

7. Check the site where the pack is applied 3-5 minutes after the initial application and observe and document signs of redness, skin discoloration or blistering. The heat source must be removed if there is any excessive redness, maceration, pronounced pallor, blistering or increased swelling as thermal injuries can occur.

8. Check the site of application regularly while the heat pack is in situ.

9. Remove the heat pack after 15-30 minutes.

10. Initiate a Clinical Incident Form if the woman’s skin integrity is impaired and/or the area remains red for greater than 20 minutes following removal of the pack.

11. Clean the heat pack as per Manufacturers guidelines before replacing in the hydrocollator.
REFERENCES (STANDARDS)

| National Standards – 1 Clinical Care is Guided by Current Best Practice |
| Legislation – Nil |
| Related Policies – |
| Other related documents – Nil |

RESPONSIBILITY
| Policy Sponsor | Nursing and Midwifery Director |
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