

Review Article



Deep Sedation in Traumatic Brain Injury Patients

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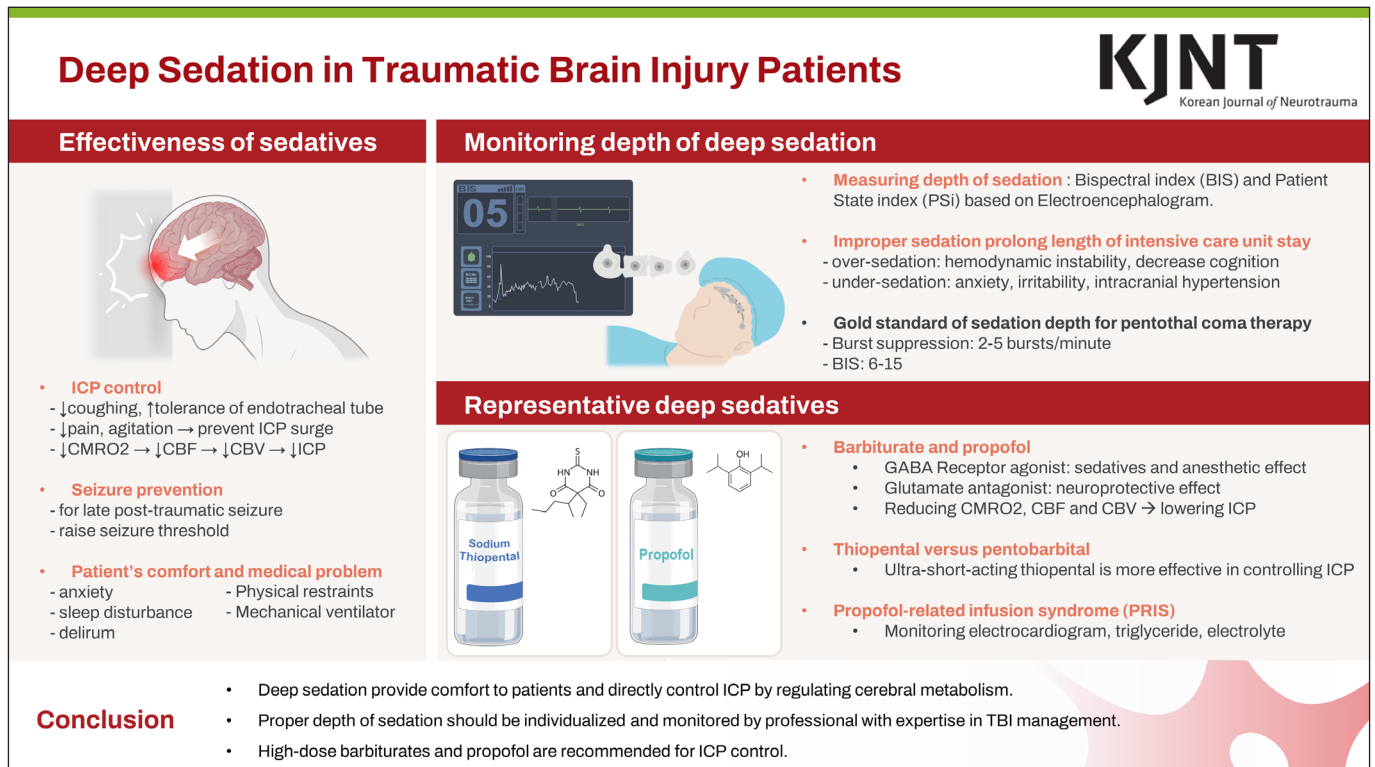
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ABSTRACT

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is one of the leading causes of mortality and disability in adults. In cases of severe TBI, preventing secondary brain injury by managing intracranial hypertension during the acute phase is a critical treatment challenge. Among surgical and medical interventions to control intracranial pressure (ICP), deep sedation can provide comfort to patients and directly control ICP by regulating cerebral metabolism. However, insufficient sedation does not achieve the intended treatment goals, and excessive sedation can lead to fatal sedative-related complications. Therefore, it is important to continuously monitor and titrate sedatives by measuring the appropriate depth of sedation. In this review, we discuss the effectiveness of deep sedation, techniques to monitor the depth of sedation, and the clinical use of recommended sedatives, barbiturates, and propofol in TBI.

Keywords: Deep sedation; Hypnotics and sedatives; Brain injuries, traumatic; Critical care

GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest concerning the materials or methods used in this study or the findings described in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

Deep sedation is widely used in the treatment of patients with traumatic brain injury (TBI) to control intracranial hypertension in the acute phase, as well as to address medical problems such as seizures, agitated behavior, sleep disorder, and delirium. It also alleviated discomfort related to anxiety and pain.^{8,21,30,33} It is important to carefully monitor and titrate the depth of sedation by medical professional with expertise in TBI management, as over-sedation can result in negative outcomes such as prolonged cognitive dysfunction, hemodynamic instability, and ventilator-associated pneumonia.^{36,37,41,49} Bispectral index (BIS) and patient state index (PSI) based on electroencephalogram are the most widely used devices for measuring sedation depth.² As neurological examination can be challenging in patients with TBI undergoing deep sedation, it is crucial to utilize monitoring devices like pupilometer or intracranial pressure (ICP) measurement to supplement the assessment of neurological function. In particular, propofol and barbiturates are recommended for patients with TBI to control intracranial hypertension.⁴ Sedatives effectively control ICP by reducing cerebral metabolic rate of oxygen and cerebral blood flow.^{33,36,37,49} However, inappropriate use of sedatives can lead to fatal complications such as hemodynamic instability, prolonged cognitive impairment, and propofol-related infusion syndrome.^{10,20,26,32,38} Therefore, sedative treatment should be performed under professional supervision.

Herein, the rationale for using deep sedation in the treatment of TBI, the monitoring of the appropriate depth of sedation, and the clinical use of sedatives will be discussed.

Ethical approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The Institutional review board of our institute approved this study. Informed consent was waived for the retrospectively studied subjects because our study did not adversely affect their rights and welfare. Participants or the legal guardians of participants in the newly developed bundle protocol group provided written informed consent prior to study enrolment.

EFFECTIVENESS OF SEDATIVES IN TBI

ICP control

When intracranial hypertension occurs in TBI patients, cerebral perfusion pressure (CPP) decreases leading to a possible decrease in cerebral blood flow (CBF).¹⁸⁾ If ICP is not appropriately controlled, sedatives are required to minimize the risk of secondary brain injury. By suppressing cough and improving the tolerance against the endotracheal tube, it is possible to prevent an increase in intrathoracic pressure which can lead to an increase in intracranial pressure.^{36,37)}

By alleviating pain and anxiety and managing agitation, it can help prevent arterial hypertension often associated with surges in ICP.^{36,37)} First of all, a comfortable environment should be established using non-pharmacological methods, including reducing noise levels, managing lighting to facilitate sleep, providing explanations about the patient's condition, and minimizing the unnecessary use of restraints. The use of appropriate and sufficient analgesics can mitigate the side effects of sedatives, such as hemodynamic instability and metabolic disorders, by reducing the dosage of sedatives and concurrently alleviating pain and reducing ICP.^{8,16,29,36)} Moreover, this practice has the potential to decrease the length of intensive care unit stay and ventilator days, and to enhance achievement of sedation goals.^{8,39,45)} For example, the simultaneous use of remifentanyl as an analgesic and propofol as a sedative is commonly used to manage intracranial hypertension in TBI patients.^{36,39)} However, if sedatives suppress breathing and cause carbon dioxide retention, it may result in cerebral vasodilation and increase ICP, particularly when autoregulation is not functioning properly. Hence, continuous monitoring of carbon dioxide levels is necessary. Moreover, certain sedatives such as barbiturate and propofol can enhance CPP by controlling CBF and cerebral blood volume (CBV), and reducing cerebral metabolic rate of oxygen (CMRO₂), which in turn improves intracranial hypertension.^{33,36,37,49)}

Seizure control

When brain damage occurs, it is difficult to maintain CBF and falls into a state of energy depletion, and as sodium and potassium alteration occurs based on the cell membrane, the secretion of glutamate increases. As a result, the seizure threshold is lowered, and the apoptosis pathway is activated by seizures, leading to neuronal death.^{19,24)} Therefore, preventing and controlling seizures is a very important issue in patients with brain damage. Post-traumatic seizures after severe TBI are common. The incidence of clinical post-traumatic seizure is 12%, and that of subclinical post-traumatic seizure detected on electroencephalogram (EEG) is 20%–25%.⁴⁾ Seizure leads to increase cerebral metabolism, causing a mismatch with oxygen delivery.^{19,24)} Early post-traumatic seizure occurring within the first week after trauma is a risk factor for late post-traumatic seizure occurring a week later.⁵²⁾ Early post-traumatic seizure can be controlled by using anti-epileptic drugs, whereas, continuous use of anti-epileptic drugs is not effective in preventing or reducing the

risk of developing late post-traumatic seizure.^{47,50} Sedation can prevent and reduce the risk of late post-traumatic seizure. Several studies reported that phenobarbital and midazolam as sedatives raise seizure threshold and reduce the incidence of late post-traumatic seizure.^{3,12,34,42,50}

Patient's comfort and medical problem

Patients admitted to an intensive care unit often experience anxiety due to the unpleasant nature of their surroundings. Mechanical ventilation and invasive treatments can exacerbate pain and anxiety, leading to the development of sleep disorders, delirium, and poor prognosis, including an increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder and mortality.^{10,54} Delirium is a prevalent condition affecting 50%–80% of severely ill patients, leading to acute cerebral dysfunction and adverse outcomes such as increased mortality, prolonged hospitalization, higher medical expenses, and long-term cognitive impairment similar to dementia.^{10,20,32} Patients with neurological conditions are at higher risk of delirium due to exposure to multiple precipitating factors such as surgery, admission to an intensive care unit, physical restraints, mechanical ventilation, pain, and sleep disorders in addition to their primary neurological disease.^{20,32} Appropriate sedation can help reduce the stress response, create a more comfortable environment, and control some of the factors that contribute to long-term health issues, such as pain, sleep disturbance, delirium, and seizures.³²

MONITORING DEPTH OF DEEP SEDATION IN TBI

The proper depth of sedation in TBI depends on several factors, including severity of injury, a patient's medical condition, and the presence of other injuries. The proper depth of sedation relieves pain and anxiety, controls delirium, as well as controls brain edema so that ICP could be managed.³⁶ Over-sedation can lead to unfavorable outcomes such as respiratory depression, hemodynamic instability, long-term decrease in cognitive function and have limitation of neurologic assessment. Under-sedation causes anxiety, agitation, irritability in patients and intracranial hypertension. Both of improper depth of sedation prolong length of intensive care unit stay, and increase medical costs. The proper sedation in TBI should be individualized and monitored by professional with expertise in TBI management, considering the patient's individual medical conditions and needs. The depth of sedation should be continuously monitored and adjusted as needed.

In intensive care unit, the depth of sedation is measured by Richmond Agitation-Sedation Scale.¹¹ However, in the case of brain-injured patients, there are limitations in its application due to the characteristics of the disease. EEG-based mechanical devices such as BIS and PSI can measure the depth of sedation in brain-injured patients. Both BIS and PSI provide real-time information on the level of consciousness and sedation by expressing the suppression ratio as a number. In the case of catastrophic brain injury or brain death, the suppression ratio is almost 100%, and the BIS and PSI values are zero.² When measuring the suppression ratio, BIS measures only the EEG signal, while PSI comprehensively measures various physiological variables such as electromyogram (EMG) and heart rate.^{2,9} Therefore, it is important to avoid making decisions based solely on BIS values.

However, in severe TBI patients where the impact of EMG is minimal, the BIS value correlates quite well with level of consciousness and depth of sedation.^{28,44,48} Mahmood et al.²⁸ reported that BIS values have a significant correlation with initial Glasgow Coma Score and can assist in the early detection of brain death with severe acute TBI. Furthermore, the relationship between

the number of bursts/minute on the EEG, the suppression ratio, and the BIS value during pentothal coma therapy (PCT) has been proven.^{5,44,48,51} In PCT to reduce ICP to below 15mmHg, it has been demonstrated that when target burst suppression reached 3–5 burst/minute, BIS was 15 and suppression rate was 71% in adult patients,⁴⁴ while BIS was 14 and suppression ratio was 75% in pediatric patients.⁴⁸ There is a lack of consensus on the number of bursts/minute that is appropriate as the gold standard for PCT, however, it is commonly set as 2–5 bursts/minute.^{5,44,46,48,51} In 2008, Cottenceau et al.⁷ defined a word ‘burst’ as a period of electric activity interspersed with at least a second of suppression, and demonstrated a significant correlation between suppression ration on EEG and BIS value not only on the target BIS values but also on the entire range of BIS values from zero to 100 and suggested a guideline for PCT titration. They recommended the rate of barbiturate infusion might be decreased if BIS is <6 or increased if BIS is >15.⁷ There are relatively few studies on optimal PSI value during PCT, however there is a report that BIS and PSI values show a high correlation of 0.8455 in sedation using propofol.⁴⁰

REPRESENTATIVE DEEP SEDATIVES IN TBI

In the 4th TBI guidelines, high-dose barbiturates and propofol are recommended for ICP control.⁴ Although there are other sedatives available for ICP management, due to a lack of evidence regarding their use, the choices of drug selection and dosages are diverse among physicians.¹⁵ Compared to propofol, midazolam has lower hemodynamic stability.³⁷ However, it is less effective in reducing CMRO₂, CBF, and ICP, and is associated with delayed awakening,³⁷ prolonged intensive care unit stay and mechanical ventilation, and increase risk of delirium and post-traumatic stress disorder.^{13,39,43,53} Therefore, there are limitations to using midazolam as a first-line drug for intracranial hypertension in TBI patients. Dexmedetomidine, an β -2 agonist, is a drug suitable for mild sedation and is useful for patients who exhibit agitation and delirium, however it has limited effects on managing ICP and CBF.³⁷ Hence, this article focus on the 2 recommended sedatives in TBI, barbiturate and propofol.

Barbiturate

According to the TBI guidelines by Brain Trauma Foundation, ‘administration of barbiturate to induce burst suppression as prophylaxis is not recommended.’ Because there is no significant difference in mortality or Glasgow Outcome Scale, and ‘high-dose barbiturate administration is recommended to control elevated ICP refractory to maximum standard medical and surgical treatment.’ With the evidence that lower ICP had higher likelihood of survival for responders to treatment.⁴ Several studies have reported that the survival rate is superior to barbiturate coma therapy for severe intracranial hypertension.^{25,27} Barbiturate is a β -aminobutyric acid receptor agonist, which exhibit the effect of sedation and anesthesia, also has a neuroprotective effect as a glutamate antagonist.⁶ On the premise that carbon dioxide reactivity is preserved during barbiturate coma therapy, not only CBV is reduced through a significant decrease in CBF, but also CMRO₂ is reduced, which has the effect of lowering ICP.^{6,31,35} Thiopental, an ultra-short acting drug with a half-life of 3–18 hours, and pentobarbital, a short-acting drug with a that of 15–50 hours, are representative barbiturates used in barbiturate coma therapy.⁶ After intravenous administration of the two drugs to rat, the concentration of the drugs in the serum and brain was measured.¹⁴ Thiopental, which has better lipid solubility, was confirmed that the brain and serum concentration rapidly increased and was distributed and fell to the plateau level within minutes and it was interpreted that the effective level was quickly reached at the start of barbiturate coma therapy to control initial intracranial hypertension. In contrast, pentobarbital not only took more time for this process,

but also had a strong tendency to maintain its concentration without dropping after reaching the plateau level. It is related to hemodynamic instability. In a randomized controlled trial conducted on 44 patients with TBI, the patients were divided into 2 groups, thiopental and pentobarbital.⁴¹⁾ The study found that the thiopental group was more effective in controlling ICP while the incidence of side effects such as hemodynamic instability and infections was similar between the two groups.⁴¹⁾ However, in terms of mean blood pressure reduction and inotropic demands, the thiopental group was found to be superior.⁴¹⁾

Pentobarbital is recommended to administrate as a loading dose of 10 mg/kg over 30 minutes, followed by a maintenance dose of 1–3 mg/kg/hr to induce burst suppression on the EEG.²⁾ When discontinuing barbiturate coma therapy, it is recommended to monitor ICP, brain tissue oxygenation (PbtO₂), and mean blood pressure, and gradually decrease the dose by 0.5 mg/kg/hr every 6 hours.²⁾ According to research conducted with thiamylal, which is very similar to thiopental, a fixed dose of 3.0mg/kg/hour lead to toxic level within 24–48 hours, and when combined with hypothermia treatment, a more rapid increase in serum level was observed. Therefore, a step-down method is recommended with doses of 3-2-1.5-1.0 mg/kg/hour every 24 hours to avoid reaching toxic levels. Ultimately, monitoring of BIS, raw EEG, and serum barbiturate level should be performed.²³⁾

Propofol

According to the TBI guidelines by Brain Trauma Foundation, propofol is recommended for the control of ICP, not for improvement in mortality or 6-month outcomes.⁴⁾ Propofol, like barbiturate, also acts as a β -aminobutyric acid receptor agonist and glutamate antagonist.^{1,36,37)} It has dose-dependent EEG suppression effect and reduce ICP through CBF and CMRO₂ coupling by preserving cerebrovascular autoregulation.^{22,37,49)} Van Hemelrijck et al.⁴⁹⁾ reported that as the dose of propofol increased, there were significant decrease in CBF and mean blood pressure. Propofol protects astrocytes from oxidative stress caused by acting at various stages of inhibiting lipid peroxidation and apoptosis leading to cell death.^{1,17)}

However, prolonged infusion of propofol requires caution in its use because it can cause rare but fatal complications propofol-related infusion syndrome (PRIS) as well as hemodynamic instability. PRIS is characterized by inducing an adenosine triphosphate depletion state by causing impairment of β oxidation in the mitochondria, which leads to rhabdomyolysis-induced renal failure, hyperkalemia, and cardiac dysfunction ultimately resulting in cardiovascular collapse and death.^{26,38)} Specifically, TBI increases the risk of PRIS, and the risk becomes higher when the dose exceeds 4 mg/kg/hr for more than 48 hours.^{26,38)} Therefore, greenish-colored urine, lipid such as triglyceride and electrolyte serum levels, and electrocardiogram should be monitored intensively during propofol infusion. When PRIS is suspected, administration of propofol and lipid preparations should be discontinued immediately.^{26,38)}

CONCLUSION

Deep sedative treatment not only helps regulate intracranial hypertension properly by directly acting on the brain during the acute phase of TBI, but also mitigates medical issues associated with brain damage such as seizures and delirium, and improves patient's comfort for quality intensive care. However, inadequate or excessive depth of sedation can lead to various complications. Therefore, it is crucial for experts in TBI care to diligently and continuously monitor and titrate the depth of sedation.

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