The glasgow coma scale clinical application in emergency departments

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ANDRIANA IANKOVA discusses the use of the Glasgow Coma Scale assessment tool in adult patients with head injury whose levels of consciousness may be compromised by alcohol

About one million people with head injuries attend emergency departments (EDs) every year in the UK (Surgical Tutor 2006). On average, 150,000 of these are admitted to hospital (Headway 2006, Treadwell and Mendelow 1994) and most are discharged within 48 hours (Flint 1999).

The Glasgow Coma Scale/Score (GCS) estimates coma severity based on Eye (4), Verbal (5), and Motor (6) criteria. The GCS allows providers in multiple settings and with varied levels of training to communicate succinctly about a patient's mental status. The GCS has been shown to have statistical correlation with a broad array of adverse neurologic outcomes, including brain injury, need for neurosurgery, and mortality. The GCS score has been incorporated into numerous guidelines and assessment scores (e.g. ACLS, ATLS, APACHE I-III, TRISS and WNS SAH Grading Scale). Points to keep in mind: Correlation with outcome and severity is most accurate when applied to an individual patient over time; the patient's...