Understanding the Mystery of Brain Death

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Understanding the Mystery of Brain Death

Natalie A. Felter, R.N., B.S.N.

Pathophysiological Process

Brain death is defined as an “irreversible loss of all brain function, or “whole brain” death (Copnell, 2014, p.231).” Brain death can be caused by various factors, such as trauma, ischemia, meningitis, anoxic injury, or intracranial hemorrhage. Diagnosis of brain death is determined by absence of brain reflexes, presence of coma, and apnea (Lugt, 2010). The diagnosis of brain death is considered to be equal to death (Thomas, 2012).

Signs and Symptoms of Brain Stem Death

GCS score of less than three
• Absence of ocular motility in the head turning (no eye movement)
• Fixed pupils
• Absent cough, concomitant, and gag reflexes
• Absence of cold caloric responses to irrigation of extraocular auditory canals
• Absent respiratory (as confirmed by positive apnea test)

References


Additional Sources


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