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## Analysis of the effectiveness of noninvasive ventilation techniques in patients with COVID-19

### Analiza skuteczności nieinwazyjnych technik wentylacji u pacjentów z COVID-19

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#### Słowa kluczowe

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#### Conflict of interest

##### Konflikt interesów

None

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#### Summary

Health care system from the end of 2019 faced a huge challenge worldwide which was the emergence of a new species of coronavirus called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) in Wuhan, China. Within a short time, the pathogen revealed a pandemic nature. On January 30, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The greatest threat to human health and life is the damage to the lungs that accompanies a virus infection and the development of Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS). As the epidemic proceeded, a significant amount of the hospital bed facilities was occupied by patients requiring passive oxygen therapy and, in large part, respiratory support using high flow oxygen therapy (HFNC) and continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) devices. A variety of techniques for applying passive oxygen therapy allow the use of different oxygen flows, with a proportional increase in  $FiO_2$  in the breathing mixture.

#### Streszczenie

System Opieki Zdrowotnej od końca 2019 roku na całym świecie stanął przed ogromnym wyzwaniem, którym było pojawienie się nowego gatunku koronawirusa zwanego koronawirusem drugiego ciężkiego zespołu oddechowego (SARS-CoV-2) w Wuhan (Chiny). W krótkim czasie patogen ujawnił charakter pandemiczny. 30 stycznia 2019 roku Światowa Organizacja Zdrowia (WHO) ogłosiła wybuch pandemii COVID-19. Największym zagrożeniem zdrowia i życia człowieka jest uszkodzenie płuc, które towarzyszy infekcji wywołanej wirusem, oraz rozwinięcie się ostrej niewydolności oddechowej (ARDS). W trakcie rozwoju epidemii znacząca część bazy łóżkowej szpitali została wypełniona pacjentami wymagającymi tlenoterapii biernej, a w dużej części wspomaganie oddechu przy pomocy tlenoterapii wysokoprzepływowej (HFNC) oraz urządzeń generujących ciągłe dodanie ciśnienia w drogach oddechowych (CPAP). Różne techniki stosowania tlenoterapii biernej pozwalają na zastosowanie różnych przepływów tlenu, z proporcjonalnym wzrostem  $FiO_2$  w mieszaninie oddechowej.

#### INTRODUCTION

The ongoing pandemic of the new coronavirus disease COVID-19 poses a serious threat to the world's human population, particularly in countries with limited health care system efficacy (1). Severe bilateral pneumonia is the main symptom of COVID-19, so adequate ventilatory support is critical for patient survival. Although knowledge about COVID-19 continues to

grow, it is still unclear what type of respiratory failure support is the most beneficial. Hypoxemia is crucial in the course of COVID-19, so improving oxygenation is the first and essential step in the treatment of patients with COVID-19 (2, 3). This becomes particularly important in situations of limited capacity for mechanical ventilation due to lack of equipment or medical staff. Oxygen delivery can be increased using non-invasive

techniques which are more advanced than the reservoir face mask, such as non-invasive ventilation (NIV) using CPAP masks or helmets, high flow nasal ventilation (HFNC), and the abdominal position called the prone position (4-6).

The presence of hypoxemia itself should not be an indication for endotracheal intubation and mechanical ventilation, as hypoxemia in COVID-19 is often remarkably well tolerated. Exhaustion due to respiratory failure as well as consciousness disturbances and increasing hypercapnia argue for the implementation of invasive mechanical ventilation.

### **NON-INVASIVE VENTILATION (NIV) USING HFNC, CPAP MASKS OR HELMETS**

Nasal cannulas enable the administration of oxygen at the flow of up to 6 L/min ( $FiO_2$  about 45%), various types of face masks allow the use of oxygen flows of 10-20 L/min ( $FiO_2$  about 61-99%). However, it should be noted that an increase in oxygen flow increases the risk of contamination of personnel and the environment with pathogens (7). Aerosol dispersion during oxygen therapy using a face mask with a reservoir has been shown to range from  $11.2 \pm 0.7$  to  $27.2 \pm 1.1$  cm (8). The use of non invasive ventilation (NIV) methods results in a similar level of aerosol dispersion e.g. for HFNC  $6.5 \pm 1.5$ - $17.2 \pm 3.3$  cm for a flow rate of 10-60 l/min respectively, allowing a much higher arterial blood oxygen saturation to be achieved. This enables their large-scale use in departments treating patients for COVID-19.

In hypoxaemic respiratory failure manifesting as decreased saturation, accelerated and shallow breathing, the essential element of therapy is to increase the oxygen concentration in the respiratory mixture of the patient by expanding the inflamed alveoli, improving ventilation and alveolar perfusion, mechanical, continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) breathing support and ventilator therapy (9, 10). Most patients with COVID-19 should be ventilator-assisted with the lowest possible effective inspired oxygen concentration ( $FiO_2$ ). The saturation of the patient on ventilatory support should be maintained between 92-96% (11-13).

Non-invasive ventilation allows the patient to be ventilated with positive inspiratory pressure without the need for endotracheal intubation, using face masks, nasal masks, or intranasal cannulas adapted to deliver High Flow Oxygen Therapy (HFOT). When evaluating a patient with a high probability of developing acute respiratory failure, a prompt decision to initiate NIV is crucial. Delaying the decision to use NIV increases the risk of treatment failure (14-16). This method is mainly used by emergency departments and intensive care units. Studies show beneficial effects of this type of ventilation also in internal medicine departments (17). The beneficial effect of non-invasive therapy is possible thanks to the care of the patient by adequately trained medical staff. Analysis of the procedure of NIV use by emergency medical teams in prehospital management

indicates a reduction in mortality and a decrease in the risk of patient intubation. A trained member of the emergency medical team, can successfully use CPAP in patients with severe respiratory failure. This is associated with a 30% reduction in intubation rates, and a 21% reduction in mortality in appropriately qualified patients (18-21).

There are some technology solutions available to ensure proper bedside NIV in the emergency department or intensive care setting. CPAP is a therapy that allows the delivery of a breathing mixture under positive pressure that is maintained in the airway throughout the respiratory cycle. The patient independently initiates inspiration through a mask tightly placed on the face, which allows ventilation with oxygen or its mixture with air using positive pressure generated by the device. It leads to the creation of positive pressure in the airways protecting the alveoli from collapsing (22). The ventilator is controlled by setting the end-inspiratory pressure at which the inspiratory phase is terminated. The optimal baseline positive airway pressure (PEEP) should be 5 to 8 cm  $H_2O$  and  $FiO_2$  which should be able to maintain saturation  $> 90\%$ . PEEP can be increased to 20-25 cm  $H_2O$ , but special caution must be taken in such cases due to the higher than in other conditions risk of barotrauma.

Another non-invasive respiratory support technique that was widespread during the COVID-19 pandemic is high flow nasal cannula oxygen therapy (HFNC).

It allows oxygen to be administered to the patient through wide cannulas occupying 3/4 of the width of the nostrils. The device allows the administered air/oxygen mixture to be heated to 37 degrees Celsius, which prevents damage to the nasal mucosa. The oxygen minute flow for an adult patient can be set in the range of 40-60 L/min, with an oxygen concentration in the mixture from 21-100%.

Both of these techniques for assisting the patient's breathing can be combined with the prone position, particularly when severe respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) is present, i.e. a decrease in the  $PaO_2/FiO_2$  ratio  $< 150$ . Positioning the patient on the abdomen with support for at least 8-16 hours per day results in increased alveolar recruitment and improved oxygenation (23-25). Clinical observations indicate positive effects of abdominal positioning in conscious patients using passive oxygen therapy and non-invasive ventilation methods (26, 27). The supine position shifts the heart muscle anteriorly, which does not press on the lungs. Additionally, ventilation of the posterior lung regions is improved. The use of the abdominal position is associated with complications, such as skin ischaemia due to continuous compression, displacement of catheters, endotracheal tubes, probes, and cardiac arrhythmias (28). When sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) occurs, implementation of proper resuscitation processes is an issue (29, 30). The American Heart Association guidelines in earlier recommendations emphasized the priority of placing the patient on their back. The 2020 up-

date of the recommendations does not indicate a more favorable solution (31-33).

Suddenly changing the position of the patient during cardiac arrest may exacerbate the patient's hemodynamic instability.

Conducting NIV with an oxygen helmet is a relatively inexpensive procedure. It allows for patient's breathing support with an inspiratory pressure range up to 17-20 cm H<sub>2</sub>O, depending on the model, and to maintain positive end-expiratory pressure (PEEP), improving ventilation of compressed alveoli. The introduction of the possibility of CPAP helmet ventilation, has reduced the number of long-term complications that occur after the use of NIV (34). A comparison of mechanically ventilated patients to a control group indicated a significant reduction in mortality in patients who used an oxygen helmet. In addition, a reduction in the need for intubation was demonstrated in patients who received NIV with the use of an oxygen helmet (35, 36). Patient tolerance of the procedure may be an issue.

### CONTRAINDICATIONS TO THE USE OF NIV

When deciding whether to implement noninvasive ventilation techniques in a patient with COVID-19, contraindications should be considered. The most important of these are impaired consciousness, as well as lack of patient cooperation due to other reasons. In addition, non-invasive ventilation techniques should not be used in patients with airway obstruction, facial deformities, high risk of regurgitation, and significant amounts of secretions without effective evacuation (37, 38).

### MONITORING THE PATIENT DURING NIV

Once the NIV procedure has been implemented, the patient should be carefully observed. In the first few minutes, early problems such as complete mask intolerance, air leaks should be excluded. Once the patient accepts the therapy, the patient's vital signs and blood oxygenation parameters should be closely monitored for the next two hours: saturation, cardiac function, blood pressure measurement and acid-base balance, arterial blood gas meter. After two hours, based on the patient's clinical status, including the degree of cooperation, and arterial blood gasometry results of laboratory tests, a decision can be made to maintain therapy in patients with a positive response. If NIV fails and the patient's condition deteriorates, endotracheal intubation and ventilator ventilation should be considered. Unfortunately, a large percentage of NIV fails in patients with acute respiratory failure (39-42).

Withholding therapy in a patient should be based on observation of the patient's general condition, and resolution of the cause of respiratory failure. There are no universal parameters to determine the patient's readiness to discontinue therapy; optimal parameters may include respiratory rate in the range of 12-22 breaths/min, saturation above 90% with FiO<sub>2</sub> equal to or greater than 60%, hemodynamic stability achieved with no or minimal effect of vasopressors with

preserved heart rate in the range of 50-120 beats/min, minimum NIV settings in the range of BIPAP positive olfactory pressure 10 cm H<sub>2</sub>O, airway pressure 5 cm H<sub>2</sub>O, or CPAP at a maximum of 10 cm H<sub>2</sub>O. If the patient's oxygen needs can be met in the FiO<sub>2</sub> range up to 60% with a high-flow nasal cannula or low-flow oxygen, then methods to minimize the patient's exposure to high FiO<sub>2</sub> oxygen therapy should be considered.

### COMPLICATIONS

NIV therapy implemented in the proper patient is safe. If administered correctly, it should not cause side effects. However, the most common complications include: skin damage due to mask pressure on tissues, eye irritation, sinus pain, nasal congestion and bleeding due to dry mucous membranes, and mild gastric distension (43). Complications associated with the use of positive airway pressure in the form of barotrauma are rare compared to invasive ventilation methods (44).

### PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF CARING FOR A PATIENT UNDERGOING NIV

The patient should be in a sitting or semi-sitting position. It is possible to conduct NIV in the supine or Trendelenburg position.

The patient should undergo sedation and have analgesic drugs administered. Drug doses should be selected individually depending on the patient's condition and tolerance of pharmacotherapy. The potential reducing effect on the respiratory center of sedative and analgesic drugs should be kept in mind (45).

Patients with acute respiratory failure treated with NIV are usually not fed in order to not increase the risk of aspiration of food contents during possible gastric distension and vomiting. Nasogastric tubes may cause leakage of the ventilation mask and leakage of the respiratory mixture thus reducing the effectiveness of the method. If the patient needs to be fed, parenteral nutrition options should be considered. Bronchoscopy is rarely performed during NIV due to possible adverse reaction of the patient and sudden deterioration of his/her breathing, which may require endotracheal intubation and mechanical ventilation. On the other hand, the procedure itself is possible even with a full face mask by using appropriate connectors. Nebulization can be successfully administered during NIV due to the presence of a universal port in the ventilator. It is also possible to suction the patient through special ports with minimal loss of airway pressure.

Non-invasive ventilation can be used successfully in many patients. Patients in whom the incorporation of NIV should be carefully considered include those who require frequent airway suctioning or are at particular risk for oropharyngeal mask vomiting. A trained multidisciplinary team consisting of physicians, physiotherapists, paramedics, and nurses is an essential component of patient care. Infection and pressure sores prevention in the form of rotations, repositioning,

and oral toileting should be implemented. Portable NIV equipment also allows for patient diagnosis in other rooms of the therapy center.

## CONCLUSIONS

Non-invasive ventilation involves the delivery of a reathing mixture using increased inspiratory pressure by non-invasive methods. A patient with indications to start NIV should receive comprehensive care from a team trained in the use of the therapy. There should be no delay in starting the therapy. NIV can be administered using a ventilator in the intensive care unit or using a dedicated device in other units caring for patients with acute

respiratory failure. The selection of appropriate initial settings depends on the mode chosen to provide non-invasive ventilation, the availability of resources, the knowledge of the treatment team, and the patient's tolerance of the method. Once NIV is initiated, the patient should be closely monitored for technical ventilation problems or respiratory deterioration. It is important to remember that during noninvasive ventilation, the patient should be allowed a sitting or semi-sitting position that allows free breathing and comfort. NIV used when contraindications have been ruled out is a safe and effective technique for respiratory support.

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