



Research Article

Relative and bedside nurse assessment of comfort and communication during propofol, dexmedetomidine, or clonidine-based sedation: pre-planned analysis within the A2B RCT

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Plain language summary

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Patients receiving intensive care unit usually require sedation to keep them comfortable and pain-free. The most widely used sedation is currently a drug called propofol. Two alternatives are the drugs dexmedetomidine and clonidine. Both are called 'alpha2-agonists' based on how they work.

The Alpha 2 Agonists for Sedation to Produce Better Outcomes From Critical Illness trial was a large study comparing these three drugs for sedating patients during their intensive care unit stay. The trial found no differences in the time spent on the breathing machine or in the intensive care unit. There were no differences in rates of delirium or the quality of sedation measured using scoring systems, except patients who received the alpha2-agonists appeared to experience more agitation compared with propofol.

As part of the trial, we asked bedside nurses to answer 'yes' or 'no' to questions asking their opinion at the end of their nursing shift on whether patients appeared to be able to communicate pain and could co-operate with care. We also asked the patients' closest relatives' their 'yes/no' response to questions about whether they thought their relative appeared awake or comfortable and whether they could communicate with the patient when visiting. We compared responses to each question for both alpha2-agonist groups with the propofol group.

We found that, overall, nurses thought patients sedated with dexmedetomidine were better able to communicate pain than with propofol, but found no difference between clonidine and propofol. There were no differences in the ability to co-operate with care. Relatives thought patients sedated with dexmedetomidine appeared more awake than with propofol. The difference for clonidine was smaller.

Despite finding no differences in clinical outcomes between the sedation approaches used in the Alpha 2 Agonists for Sedation to Produce Better Outcomes From Critical Illness trial, both nurses and relatives may perceive differences in some aspects of sedation quality depending on the sedation medicine used.