

All About Lighted Stylet Intubation

The lighted stylet is a device that uses illumination to facilitate tracheal placement of the endotracheal tube, thus eliminating the need for direct laryngoscopy. Typically, the stylet is inserted through an endotracheal tube and is then bent to a near right angle. The device then is placed through the mouth in the midline, and rocked forward to bring the light and tube through the glottis. Placement is confirmed by a localized anterior glow in the neck. The technique is easy to learn, even with minimal training. Most stylets can be accommodated by tubes with internal diameters as small as 2.5 mm.

This technique has a success rate near 100% in adults and 75% to 85% in small children and infants, and it is successful even in patients who fail intubation by direct laryngoscopy. Intubation with the lighted stylet results in less sympathetic stimulation than with direct laryngoscopy and in less upper airway trauma. Complications are minimal. The lighted stylet is recommended for management of difficult airways in both anesthesia and emergency medicine. It also may be useful in pre-hospital care, when direct laryngoscopy is not possible.

Comment: This excellent review is worth reading in its entirety. Although ED experience has been limited, the lighted stylet is an important rescue and difficult airway device, and emergency physicians should become familiar with it.

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