

Availability of Difficult Airway Equipment in the ED

Although uncommon, the difficult airway is more frequently encountered in the ED than in the controlled setting of the operating room. These authors conducted a telephone survey in August 1999 to determine the availability of equipment for difficult airway management at all 197 EDs in England.

In all or almost all EDs, curved laryngoscope blades (100 percent), gum elastic bougies (99 percent), and surgical airway devices (98 percent) were available. The majority of departments (89 percent) had at least one alternative airway device, primarily laryngeal mask airway (LMA) (65 percent) or needle cricothyrotomy kit (63 percent). Other devices, such as a lighted stylet, fiberoptic scope, or intubating LMA were uncommon (< 10 percent). End tidal CO₂ detectors were available in 74 percent of EDs.

Comment: The authors appropriately recommend that all EDs should have at least one alternative airway device available in addition to laryngoscopy and a surgical airway device. It is still not clear whether the availability of specific rescue devices or of multiple devices increases the success of difficult airway management. It is troubling that 26 percent of English EDs do not have access to a CO₂ detector, which is the current gold standard for confirmation of endotracheal tube placement in North America.

— *RJ Vissers*

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