

Appendix 2: Red Flags



Red flags NTSP 2012



From the NTSP tracheostomy manual (page 105)

<http://www.trachchangeostomy.org.uk/>

Increased patient risk

These are clues that a problem is occurring or may be about to occur and requires prompt action.

1. Airway

- a. The patient with a cuffed tracheostomy tube suddenly being able to talk (implying gas escaping proximally and the cuff no longer 'sealing' the trachea)
- b. Frequent requirement for (excessive) inflation of the cuff to prevent air leak
- c. Pain at the tracheostomy site
- d. A suction catheter not passing easily into the trachea
- e. A changing, inadequate or absent capnograph trace

2. Breathing

- a. Increasing ventilator support or increasing oxygen requirements
- b. Respiratory distress
- c. Surgical (subcutaneous) emphysema (gas in the soft tissues)
- d. The patient complaining that they cannot breathe or have difficulties in breathing
- e. Suspicion of aspiration (feed aspirated on tracheal toilet – suggests that the cuff is not functioning adequately)

3. Circulation or any other general clinical deterioration

As with all assessments of the acutely unwell patient, an ABCDE assessment includes ensuring that the airway is patent. In this case, this includes assessment of the tracheostomy tube.