

CENTRAL VENOUS ACCESS CATHETERS (CVAC)

Information for patients

Introduction

- A CVAC is a catheter or tube made of synthetic materials, inserted under your skin, into a vein. It is a convenient and relatively pain-free way to give substances intravenously, such as chemotherapeutic agents, antibiotics, intravenous nutrition fluid, and to draw blood via the catheter as well as haemodialysis.
- There are several types of CVACs such as tunneled catheters (e.g. Hickman's or Broviac's catheters), peripherally inserted central catheters (PICC), dialysis catheters and implantable ports.
- Without a CVAC, the alternative is to puncture the skin afresh each time blood is to be taken or through siting and simple intravenous catheter which requires changing every 2 - 3 days. When your doctor recommends a CVAC, it is with your best interest in mind. It could make your frequent treatments more comfortable.

Procedure

- It is performed under local anaesthesia using aseptic techniques.
- A needle is inserted into the vein under image guidance, followed by guidewire.
- The skin entry site is serially dilated. The catheter is then inserted over the guidewire to the correct position in a central vein.
- The next step depends on the type of catheter. For a tunneled catheter, a skin tunnel is then created before the skin wound is sutured and the completion of the procedure. For a port, a small subcutaneous site is created to harbour the port before skin is sutured over it. For other catheters, they are sutured to the skin to minimize slippage.
- You should avoid or minimize any activity that risks the dislodgement of CVAC.
- The portion of the catheter that is outside your body should be secured with tape.
- A CVAC may be needed for periods from a few weeks to several years, depending on catheter nature, its condition, clinical circumstances and advice of clinicians.

Potential Complications

Varies with different catheters and skin entry site and reason for placement of CVAC, the more frequent complications include:

- Infections
- Blockage of the CVAC
- Clotting of the vein
- Catheter fracture
- Irregular heart beat
- Pneumothorax
- Venous and adjacent arterial injury

Disclaimer

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Prepared in 2010. Version 2.0