

National Major Trauma Nursing Group

Adult Ward Nursing Competencies for the Major Trauma Patient

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Acknowledgements:

V2.0 (2026)

NMTNG Chair – Tiffany Smith

NMTNG Advisory Group member – Hannah Kosuge

NMTNG Member – Sian Cross

V1.1 amendments

NMTNG Co-Chair – Hannah Kosuge, North East London and Essex Trauma Network Manager

NMTNG Member - Elaine Cole, Director of Research and Innovation, London Major Trauma System

NMTNG Member - Mark Lilley, Paediatric Major Trauma Coordinator, Royal Hospital for Children, Glasgow

NMTNG Member - Stuart Wildman, Consultant Nurse in Major Trauma, Salford Royal NHS Trust

V1.0 (2018)

NMTNG Adult Ward Subgroup Chair - Stuart Wildman, Consultant Nurse in Major Trauma, Salford Royal NHS Trust

NMTNG Adult Ward Subgroup Vice Chair - Claire Marks, Major Trauma Centre Coordinator – MTCC Lead, Derriford Hospital

NMTNG Chair - Robert Pinate, Consultant Nurse, ED, University College London Hospitals

All Members of the NMTNG Adult Ward Subgroup: Credit to a wide group of nurses from across Trauma Units, Major Trauma Centres and Trauma Networks who were involved in the original competency document creation in 2018.

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- Emergency Care Association, Royal College of Nursing
- Faculty of Emergency Nursing
- NHS Education for Scotland
- Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust
- Pan-London Trauma Nursing Group
- The Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust

Introduction:

The adult ward-based nursing competencies for the major trauma patient provide a national template of competence in the care of the adult major trauma patient being cared for in an acute bed base within both major trauma centres and trauma units.

The Quality Indicator:

The *Quality Surveillance Team Major Trauma Services Quality Indicators* (2026) include the following standard:

On wards that care for trauma patients there should be a nurse and/or AHP available 24/7 who has successfully attained or is working toward the Adult Competency & Educational Standard as described in the National Major Trauma Nursing Group Guidance

Overview of educational standard:

The competencies aim to provide assurance that there is a baseline of one nurse per shift, who is an appropriately skilled, trained, and competent individual relevant to the major trauma patient groups cared for in your ward environment. The responsibility for completion of this competency book is for Networks, MTC's and TUs to decide locally which sections are to be completed per ward area as per local policies and procedures and clinical patient group exposure.

Educational and competency standard structure

Trusts should aim to help staff achieve competence within 12 months of commencing work in a clinical area that cares for major trauma patients. This is in addition to and should run alongside any preceptorship / supernumerary period offered to staff. They would be expected to be able to provide evidence based and holistic care for the major trauma patient as part of a trauma focused multi-disciplinary team. In addition, they will have insight into the long-term benefits / goals of multiple treatment options / care pathways. This should enable staff to independently evaluate and plan care and pathways for major trauma patients. It is advised that assessors identified within the organisation, will utilise supporting documentation to ensure a common approach to competency assessment in practice.

The competencies in practice:

- **We already have task orientated competencies in our department, why do I need these?**

These competencies are intended to support and develop practice specifically in the care of the major trauma patients. There is real value in creating a single, national, set of competencies and establishing a shared standard of competence in practice which are intended to build on generic transferable skills and knowledge. This will help ensure that all major trauma patients will receive consistently high, evidence based standardised care.

- **Which competencies do I use?**

This will be dependent on where you work.

The following table is intended to guide the nurse to focus on the competency sections that are relevant to your specific clinical area / patient group.

Section title	Mandatory to all nurses/Optional
Organisational Aspects	Mandatory
Traumatic Brain Injury	Optional if relevant to your clinical area of practice
Maxillofacial and Ocular Trauma	Optional if relevant to your clinical area of practice
Thoracic Trauma	Optional if relevant to your clinical area of practice
Spinal Column and Spinal Cord Injury	Optional if relevant to your clinical area of practice
Abdominal Trauma	Optional if relevant to your clinical area of practice
Musculoskeletal Injuries	Optional if relevant to your clinical area of practice
Pain Assessment and Management	Mandatory
The Older and/or Frail Trauma Patient	Mandatory
The Psychological impact of Major Trauma	Mandatory
The Pregnant Trauma Patient	Mandatory
The Bariatric Trauma Patient	Mandatory
Challenging Behaviour in the Trauma Patient	Mandatory

Organisational Aspects						
Organisational Aspects	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery Local/Network delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Local Trauma Network system and the centralisation of trauma services.	Demonstrates understanding of the UK trauma care system. Able to describe the local Trauma Network. Is able to identify the key contacts involved in the major trauma patients' pathway, within your organisation.					
Local guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOPs).	Demonstrates Knowledge of the existence and location of guidelines/SOPs relating to early trauma care, for example: • Secondary Transfer • Bypass criteria • Isolated head injury • Spinal injury • Burns • Repatriation criteria / Process					

Shock and Major/Massive Haemorrhage Management						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Clinical assessment and management of circulation	Can describe and explain the clinical signs of shock in the trauma patient. Can list the different types of shock relevant to the trauma patient. Has a basic understanding of the 5 sites of traumatic haemorrhage: • Chest • Abdomen • Pelvis • Long bones • External					
The secondary management of major/massive haemorrhage	Demonstrates knowledge of local major/massive haemorrhage protocol including activation guidelines. Demonstrates an understanding of the use of anti-coagulant reversal agents in the trauma patients. Demonstrates an understanding of the indications for administering tranexamic acid.					
Clinical assessment and management of disability in the trauma patient	Demonstrates an understanding of the relevance of blood glucose monitoring in the trauma patient.					
Clinical assessment of exposure and temperature control	Have a knowledge and understanding of temperature control. Demonstrates an understanding of hypothermia and its potential effects of the trauma triad.					
Management of exposure and temperature control	Understands the principles and methods of warming techniques.					

Management of Traumatic Brain Injury						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Understands the basic functions and the anatomy and physiology of the brain and cranium.	Describes the basic function and relevance of injury to the 4 lobes of the brain: • Frontal Lobe • Parietal Lobe • Temporal Lobe • Occipital Lobe Can identify signs and symptoms or a patient with a deteriorating head injury.					
Understands the classifications of traumatic brain injury.	Demonstrates a knowledge and understanding of classifications of brain injury and its presentation: • Primary injury • Secondary injury • Traumatic SAH • Extradural • Subdural • DAI • Contusions					
Care of the pre and post-operative neurosurgical patient	Demonstrates the ability to effectively monitor GCS. Demonstrates a basic knowledge and understanding of neurosurgical procedures including: • Craniotomy + evacuation • Decompressive craniectomy • Burr hole surgery					
Demonstrates an ability to care for patients with a traumatic brain injury holistically and can plan, implement and evaluate care.	Demonstrates a knowledge and understanding of potential complications following a traumatic brain injury and subsequent management: • Post traumatic amnesia (PTA) and cognitive impairment • Mental capacity and Deprivation of Liberty					

	• Challenging Behaviour and behavioural management • Seizures					
	Psychological and psychosocial effect of traumatic brain injury of patients/families and carers, including: • Post concussion syndrome • Advice on return to work/activity • Return to driving • Access to ongoing support on discharge					

Maxillofacial and Ocular Trauma						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Understands the pathophysiology of maxillofacial trauma	Demonstrates a knowledge and understanding of the implications of facial trauma, assessment and management: Dietary advice					
Understands the pathophysiology of eye trauma.	Demonstrates a knowledge and understanding of the management of eye trauma: - Eye care and prevention of infection - Periorbital haematomas					

Thoracic Trauma						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Understands the anatomy and physiology of thoracic injuries.	Demonstrates understanding of the protocol / pathways relating to thoracic injuries in your local area and where to find it. Can describe ward management and complications of: • Pulmonary Contusions • Haemothorax • Pneumothorax (simple/open/tension) • Flail chest • Cardiac Tamponade					
Rib fractures	Importance of early referral to physiotherapy Demonstrates a knowledge understanding of the management of rib fractures, including: • Pain management • Early mobilisation • Underlying lung injury • Requirement for level 2 care • Surgical fixation					
Management of chest drains	Understands the indication and set up for insertion of a chest drain. Understands and demonstrates ongoing care of a chest drain: • Insertion site care • Active mobilisation • Monitoring and documentation • Indication for when the bottle should be changed and the procedure for this. • Potential complications • Application of low thoracic suction. • Removal indications and procedure					

Spinal Column and Spinal Cord Injury						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name - date and sign
Demonstrates safe spinal immobilisation and management.	Understands the indications for c-spine immobilisation. Can demonstrate how to perform manual c-spine immobilisation. Can demonstrate being part of a team performing a log roll/tilt and describe each role.					
Clinical assessment and management of patients with spinal cord injuries	Has underlying knowledge and understanding of the presentation of SCI and the potential complications and implications: • Cervical level • Thoracic level • Lumbar level In the context of SCI, demonstrates an understanding of: • the effects of sympathetic and parasympathetic stimulation • the signs and symptoms of neurogenic shock • bladder and bowel management • temperature control • importance of positioning and pressure area care • potential respiratory compromise and complications Signs and symptoms of autonomic dysreflexia, including its management and prevention					
	Understands the referral pathway for SCI patients including the importance of ASIA scoring.					
Clinical assessment and management of patients with spinal column injuries	Demonstrates a knowledge and understanding of vertebral column injuries, and potential management and treatment options.					

The management of cervical spine collars	Understand rationale behind the use of C-spine collars. Understand possible barriers / contraindications relating to the use of C-spine collars.					
	Demonstrate the ability to assess and size patients for a c-spine collar in keeping with local guidance and training. Demonstrate the ability to effectively and safely care for a patient with a c-spine collar.					
The management of spinal braces	Demonstrate knowledge of the rationale behind the use of spinal braces. Understand possible contraindication to the use of spinal braces Demonstrate the ability to effectively and safely care for a patient with a spinal brace.					
Clinical assessment and management of patients with spinal cord injuries	Has underlying knowledge and understanding of the presentation of SCI and the potential complications and implications: • Cervical level • Thoracic level • Lumbar level In the context of SCI, demonstrates an understanding of: • the effects of sympathetic and parasympathetic stimulation • the signs and symptoms of neurogenic shock • bladder and bowel management • temperature control • importance of positioning and pressure area care • potential respiratory compromise and complications Signs and symptoms of autonomic dysreflexia, including its management and prevention					

Abdominal Trauma						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Clinical assessment and management of blunt & penetrating abdominal injuries.	Demonstrates a knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms involved in blunt and penetrating trauma, and the potential for evolving presentations.					
Clinical assessment and management of the patient with abdominal trauma	Is aware of the potential for evolving injuries of the abdomen and can escalate appropriately. • Wounds • Bruising • Imprints • Distension • back, genitals, perineum and rectum examination where appropriate					
Medical interventions in the management of abdominal trauma	Has an understanding of emergency and ongoing medical management of abdominal trauma: • Non-operative management • Interventional Radiology • Operative management					
Secondary management of abdominal trauma	Can anticipate potential complications and understand how to escalate in line with local policies.					

Musculoskeletal Injuries						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Management and Care of limb injuries	Demonstrate how to effectively assess neurovascular status. Understand the use and care of patients with orthoses local to your area, Has an understanding of the management of open fractures and associated national guidance.					
Management and care of Pelvic injuries	Demonstrate understanding of common pelvic injuries and associated mechanisms Identify potential complications including potential for injury to internal organs Discuss issues regarding moving and handling of stable/unstable pelvic fractures Understand rationale for pelvic binders and when to remove these					
Management of amputations	Demonstrates knowledge of the level of amputations and their implications. Demonstrates knowledge of pain management for amputees. Demonstrate knowledge of wound care following amputations. Demonstrates an understanding of psychological impact of amputation Can demonstrate knowledge of the local pathway for rehabilitation and prosthesis fitting, and sign posting to support services.					

External Fixators	Demonstrates knowledge of different external fixators and their implications for use Demonstrate pin-site care as per local policy and national guidance, and identification or potential infection. Has an awareness of the psychological impact of external fixators					
Skin and Skeletal Traction	Demonstrates knowledge of the rationale behind the use of skin and skeletal traction and injuries it may be used for. Demonstrates knowledge of the possible barriers and/or contraindication to the use of traction. Identify what equipment is required for application and how to apply it / set up the bed frame. Identifies the specific needs of patient with traction in situ.					
Compartment Syndrome	Understands the implications of compartment syndrome, and how to monitor, identify and escalate. Demonstrates a knowledge of the treatment of compartment syndrome.					
Other MSKN Complications	Demonstrates knowledge and awareness of the following potential complications: • Pulmonary embolism and DVT • Fat Embolism • Foot/wrist drop • Rhabdomyolysis • Pressure sores • Fracture blisters • Ischaemic limb injuries					

Pain Assessment and Management						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Pain management	Demonstrates an understanding of pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions to manage pain. In the context of trauma understands the various analgesic modalities available for use. Inclusive of topical, oral, intravenous, intramuscular, and regional.					

The Older and/or Frail Trauma Patient						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Clinical assessment and manage of older and/or frail trauma patients	Demonstrates a knowledge and understanding of common mechanisms of injury in older/frail patients. Demonstrates knowledge of the key differences when caring for older/frail patients and the impact upon recovery and outcomes. Important discussion points could include: • Dementia • Delirium • Physiological differences • Pain management • Treatment escalation plans Describes the implications and complications of prolonged bed rest in the older/frail patient.					

The Psychological Impact of Major Trauma						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
	Understand the complex psychological responses that a patient may experience following major trauma, including trauma informed care. Is able to identify common responses to trauma and is able to signpost or refer to appropriate services. Utilise strategies to support patients' wellbeing during their inpatient recovery phase					

The Pregnant Trauma Patient						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Clinical assessment and management of the pregnant trauma patient	Demonstrates knowledge of the specific considerations in the care of pregnant trauma patients. Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the principal physiological changes in pregnancy and how that impacts care Demonstrates knowledge of the importance of left lateral tilt and how to perform.					

The Bariatric Trauma Patient						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Clinical assessment and management of the bariatric trauma patient	Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the principal physiological differences in the bariatric patient and can outline key considerations in their care.					

Challenging Behaviour in the Trauma Patient						
Clinical Skills	Level 1 – nurse who participates in the care of the trauma patient	In-house Delivery	Work Placed Based Assessment (WPBA)	CPD / online tools	Self-assessment	Assessor: Achieved competency. Print name date and sign
Clinical assessment and management of the confused, agitated, and aggressive trauma patient	Demonstrates knowledge of the multifactorial causes of challenging behaviour. Demonstrate knowledge of the local policy on restrictive practice and when this should/could be considered.					
Ethical, legal and professional implications of trauma.	Demonstrate basic knowledge of legal considerations in the context of major trauma, including: • Safeguarding • Confidentiality (especially in relation to sharing information with other agencies such as the police) • Domestic Violence • Mental Health Act • DOLS					