A.L.T.E.
(Apparent Life Threatening Events)

DEFINITION:
An Apparent Life Threatening Events (ATLE) in a pediatric patient (12 months and under) is described as an episode that is frightening to the observer and characterized by some combination of:
- transient apnea
- color change (usually cyanotic or pallid but occasionally erythematous or plethoric)
- marked changes in muscle tone (usually marked limpness)
- choking
- gagging

INCIDENCE:
Various estimates place the incidence in the general population at 0.5% - 6.0% of all infants. For various reasons, the true frequency and prevalence of ALTE are unknown.

SIGNIFICANCE OF ALTE:
A.L.T.E may occur during sleep wakefulness or feeding and may be a symptom of many specific disorders including, but not limited to:
- gastrointestinal reflux
- infection
- seizures
- airway abnormality
- hypoglycemia
- metabolic problems
- impaired regulation of breathing during sleep and feeding

Evaluation:
Infants usually appear entirely normal by the time they reach the Emergency Department! The most important diagnostic step is to obtain a careful history of current complaint from the person who witnessed the events:
- Color
  - red
  - pale
  - cyanotic
- Respiratory effort
  - apnea
  - obstruction
  - irregular
- Sleep state
  - awake
  - asleep
- Position
  - prone
  - supine
  - upright
- Noises
  - choking
  - stridor
- Eye Movements
  - closed
  - startled
  - rolled
  - fluttering
- Relationship to feeding
  - Fluid in the mouth?
- Duration
- Need for intervention by caretaker

MANAGEMENT OF ALTE:
For ALTE, an aggressive approach is necessary to identify the etiology of the event and to initiate appropriate therapy. Hospital admission for protective monitoring, to facilitate the diagnostic evaluation and parental training is recommended.

RESOURCES: