Journal of Intensive and Critical Care
ISSN: 2471-8505

Open Access Commentary

Acute Kidney Injury in Modern Clinical Practice a Silent Disruptor of Physiological Balance

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DESCRIPTION

Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) represents a sudden decline in renal function that develops over hours to days, leading to the accumulation of metabolic waste, disturbances in fluid balance and electrolyte instability. Unlike chronic kidney disease, which evolves gradually, AKI appears abruptly and often in the context of another medical condition. Its onset may be subtle at first, marked by a slight rise in serum creatinine or a decrease in urine output yet the systemic consequences can evolve rapidly if not addressed promptly. The kidneys maintain internal equilibrium by filtering blood, removing nitrogenous waste, regulating electrolytes, balancing acid-base status and adjusting fluid levels. When this filtration capacity declines suddenly, toxins such as urea and creatinine accumulate in circulation. Simultaneously, potassium levels may rise to dangerous thresholds increasing the risk of cardiac rhythm disturbances. Fluid overload can result in pulmonary congestion while acid retention may disrupt cellular activity throughout the body. These physiological disturbances highlight the interconnected nature of renal function with cardiovascular, respiratory and neurological systems.

AKI is broadly categorized based on its origin: Prerenal, intrinsic and postrenal causes. Prerenal injury arises from decreased blood flow to the kidneys. Conditions such as severe dehydration, major blood loss, heart failure or septic shock reduce renal perfusion impairing filtration without initially damaging kidney tissue. If perfusion is restored quickly function often returns to baseline. However, persistent hypoperfusion can lead to structural injury within renal tubules. Intrinsic AKI involves direct damage to kidney structures. Acute tubular necrosis is the most frequent form commonly triggered by prolonged ischemia or exposure to nephrotoxic substances. Certain medications, including aminoglycoside antibiotics, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and radiographic contrast agents may impair renal cells when used without caution. Inflammatory processes such as glomerulonephritis and interstitial nephritis also contribute to intrinsic injury, disrupting filtration barriers and tubular integrity.

Postrenal AKI results from obstruction of urine flow. Enlarged prostate, urinary tract stones, tumors or strictures can block urinary drainage increasing pressure within the renal system and reducing filtration capacity. Relief of obstruction often leads to recovery if addressed without delay. Clinical presentation varies widely. Some individuals exhibit minimal symptoms with AKI detected only through laboratory findings. Others may experience decreased urine output swelling of the lower limbs confusion due to toxin accumulation, nausea or shortness of breath from fluid retention. In critically ill patients, AKI often develops alongside multiorgan dysfunction complicating management and worsening prognosis. Identification relies primarily on changes in serum creatinine and urine output. Even a modest increase in creatinine over a short interval signals declining kidney performance. Urinalysis may reveal protein, blood or cellular casts, offering clues about underlying pathology. Imaging such as ultrasound helps identify obstructive causes, while additional blood tests assess electrolyte imbalances and acid-base disturbances. Timely recognition allows corrective measures before irreversible damage occurs. Management centers on addressing the underlying cause while supporting renal function. In prerenal cases, restoring circulating volume through intravenous fluids or improving cardiac output may

Received: 01-March-2025; Manuscript No: IPJICC-26-23675; **Editor assigned:** 03-March-2025; PreQC No: IPJICC-26-23675 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 17-March-2025; QC No: IPJICC-26-23675; **Revised:** 22-March-2025; Manuscript No: IPJICC-26-23675 (R); **Published:** 31-March-2025; DOI: 10.36648/2471-8505.11.1.65

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Citation: Nakamura R (2025). Acute Kidney Injury in Modern Clinical Practice a Silent Disruptor of Physiological Balance. J Intensive Crit Care. 11:65.

reverse injury. For intrinsic causes related to toxins discontinuation of offending agents is essential.

Careful medication review is necessary as impaired kidneys alter drug clearance and increase toxicity risk. In postrenal obstruction catheterization or surgical intervention relieves pressure within the urinary tract. Fluid management requires careful balance. Excessive fluids may worsen pulmonary edema whereas inadequate replacement can perpetuate hypoperfusion. Measures such as intravenous calcium insulin with glucose and potassium-binding agents help stabilize cardiac membranes and shift potassium into cells. In severe cases, renal replacement therapy becomes necessary. Dialysis removes accumulated toxins corrects electrolyte imbalances and manages fluid overload when kidneys cannot perform these functions adequately. Prevention plays a significant role in reducing incidence and severity. In hospital settings monitoring kidney function in high-risk individuals such as older adults patients with diabetes or those receiving nephrotoxic medications-allows early detection. Adequate Thydration before contrast imaging procedures and careful dosing of medications according to renal function minimize harm. Infection control and prompt treatment of sepsis also reduce the likelihood of ischemic renal injury. he consequences of AKI extend beyond the immediate episode. Even after apparent recovery individuals face increased risk of developing chronic kidney disease later in life. Moreover, AKI is associated with longer hospital stays higher healthcare costs and increased mortality particularly among critically ill patients. These outcomes emphasize the need for vigilance and coordinated care. Emerging diagnostic approaches aim to identify kidney stress before significant functional decline becomes evident through traditional markers. Biomarkers such as neutrophil gelatinase-associated kidney injury molecule-1 have gained attention for their potential to detect tubular injury at earlier stages. Although their routine clinical application continues to evolve these tools illustrate ongoing efforts to improve detection and intervention timing.