“My Patient is Agitated While Receiving Mechanical Ventilation… Now What Do I Do?”

The Patient Who Is Not Meeting Sedation Targets
Usually, patients who are not severely hypoxemic will be maintained in an alert or lightly sedated state. The degree of sedation is measured by the Richmond Agitation Sedation Score (RASS). The goal RASS is usually 0 (alert) to -1 (sedated but easily arousable). When the patient is out of this range (RASS > 0), the following step-by-step process can be used to resolve the issue.

Sudden Unexpected Agitation with Ventilator Alarms
Sudden, unexpected agitation in a previously calm patient can be due to a problem with the ventilator and/or ventilator circuit or a problem with the patient. The first step in this situation is to disconnect the patient from the ventilator and manually bag them with an anesthesia bag.

- If the agitation resolves, the problem is with the ventilator or the circuit. Consult the respiratory therapist.
- If the problem does not resolve, the problem is with the patient and can be anyone of a number of problems. Perform a focused physical exam and assessment of the patient. Call for Help!