DO NOT FORGET · THE SHORT CHECKLIST

Resuscitative (clamshell) thoracotomy



Emergency bilateral anterior (clamshell) thoracotomy in traumatic cardiac arrest to release tamponade, control intrathoracic haemorrhage and allow internal cardiac massage.

EM Orbit

Patient reference	Date	Time	Completed by

The 3 steps that must not be missed

- [ ] BEFORE
Do not perform chest compressions as the main treatment of traumatic arrest from hypovolaemia or tamponade; prioritise simultaneous treatment of reversible causes.
External compressions do not work in an empty or tamponaded heart.

- [ ] DURING
Protect your own hands from the sharp cut ends of ribs and sternum.
Sharps injury risk is high; use instruments rather than fingers where possible.

- [ ] DURING
Expect bleeding from the internal mammary (thoracic) arteries and intercostal vessels when circulation returns; clamp or ligate them.
They are cut in every clamshell and bleed briskly once output recovers.

The short list: an aid to memory, not the whole procedure. The full checklist is at the QR code. It does not replace your local protocol or your clinical judgement.
EM Orbit · Emergency medicine, in one orbit · proc-resus-thoracotomy-quick · the short checklist