

Guidance

'Anticipatory medication' guidance

This guidance is for symptom control in the last days of life for very frail older people dying in care homes who do not have specialist palliative care needs. Frail older people are defined as 'aged over 75 years with the presence of multiple chronic diseases' (Kinley et al (2013) Anticipatory end of life care medication for the symptoms of terminal restlessness, pain and excessive secretions in frail older people in care homes. *End of Life Journal* Vol. 3, No. 3, pages 1-6)

PAIN		
Dying itself is not painful but some older people who have required regular oral analgesia will require a substitute when they can no longer swallow. All residents should have access to analgesia.		
Drugs to choose from	Dose	Frequency
Paracetamol suppositories or	0.5 to 1g	prn 4 to 6hrly (maximum 4g/24hrs)
s/c Morphine (see overleaf for equivalents)	1 to 5mg	prn (4 to 6hrly)*
When a resident already has a transdermal analgesic patch (buprenorphine or fentanyl) these must be continued. 'prn' analgesia should also be available	See 'Guide to dose equivalents for morphine' on next page (patches take up to 24hrs to become fully effective)	
TERMINAL RESTLESSNESS		
If a resident has been on long-term anti-psychotics, anxiolytics or anti-epileptics and is now unable to swallow seek specialist advice.		
Drugs to choose from	Dose	Frequency
Diazepam rectal solution e.g. Stesolid or	5 to 10mg	prn
s/c Midazolam or	1 to 2 to 5mg	prn (2 to 4hrly)
s/c Haloperidol**	0.5mg	prn
SECRETIONS		
To prevent excessive tracheal secretions. If the 'rattly' chest is due to end-stage pneumonia an anticholinergic is unlikely to work, consider repositioning the resident (this may be in the recumbent position).		
Drugs to choose from	Dose	Frequency
s/c Glycopyrronium	200 micrograms	prn (4 to 6hrly)
s/c Hyoscine Butylbromide (Buscopan)	10 to 20mg	prn (4 to 6hrly)
OTHER SYMPTOMS		
NAUSEA AND VOMITING		
Drugs to choose from	Dose	Frequency
s/c Haloperidol** or	0.5mg	prn
i/m Cyclizine (can be painful) or	25 to 50mg	prn (8hrly)
Domperidone suppositories	10mg	prn
BREATHLESSNESS		
Drug	Dose	Frequency
s/c Morphine	1mg	prn (4 to 6hrly)
Caution is required when prescribing as many residents will have renal impairment * 'prn' medications can be repeated once within an hour if the first dose was not effective ** Avoid completely in residents with Lewy Body Dementia and/or Parkinson's		

Guide to dose equivalents for morphine

Equivalent doses for strong opioids remain an area of controversy. The table below details the equivalents used by St Christopher's Hospice in clinical practice with no adverse outcomes. We stress that all ratios are estimates and are to be used only as a guide. We also recommend that in frail older people where there is a range, the lowest dose should be used to start with and the individual patient's medical condition taken into consideration every time a drug change is made.

ORAL MEDICINES				
Name	Dose/strength	Approximate equivalent oral morphine (po)	Approximate equivalent morphine injection (sc)	
Co-dydramol	2 tabs qds	5mg 4hrly po	2mg 4hrly sc	These doses are less than the contents of 1 ampoule (10mg in 1ml)
Codeine	60mg 4hrly			
Co-codamol 30/500	2 tabs qds			
Dihydrocodeine	60mg qds			
Tramadol	50mg qds	7 to 10mg 4hrly po	5mg 4hrly sc	
Oxycodone ('Oxynorm')	5mg 4 to 6hrly			
Oxycodone SR ('Oxycontin')	15mg BD			
PATCHES				
Check BNF for frequency of patch changes, as it varies between the three families of patch				
Name	Dose/strength	Approximate equivalent oral morphine (po)	Approximate equivalent morphine injection (sc)	
Buprenorphine ('BuTrans') <i>Change patch every 7 days – dose increase not less than every 3 days</i>	5 mcg/hr	2mg 4hrly po	1mg 4hrly sc	In end of life care it is generally best to continue an existing analgesic patch and if in pain additionally give the appropriate 'prn' dose of codeine or morphine (the same as a 4 hourly dose)
	10 mcg/hr	5mg 4hrly po	2mg 4hrly sc	
	20 mcg/hr	7 to 10mg 4hrly po	5mg 4hrly sc	
Buprenorphine ('Transtec') <i>Change patch twice a week</i>	35 mcg/hr	15mg morphine 4hrly po	7mg 4hrly sc	
	52.5 mcg/hr	20mg morphine 4hrly po	10mg 4hrly sc	
	70 mcg/hr	30mg morphine 4hrly po	15mg 4hrly sc	
Fentanyl (e.g. 'Durogesic') <i>Change patch every 72 hours</i>	12 mcg/hr	2 to 5mg morphine 4hrly po	2mg 4hrly sc	
	25 mcg/hr	5 to 10mg morphine 4hrly po	2 to 5mg 4hrly sc	
	37 mcg/hr	15 to 20mg morphine 4hrly po	7.5 to 10mg 4hrly sc	
	50 mcg/hr	20 to 30mg morphine 4hrly po	10 to 15mg 4hrly sc	