

# Kōwhai Programme

## Support for whānau & carers

### Medications

#### Common Palliative Care Medications

The most common medications are those for pain and nausea and for your bowels, but there are others that can help manage different symptoms.

It is important that regular medication is taken at regular times as this is best approach to managing symptoms. 'Extra' medication is available for symptoms that happen between regular medications. You may sometimes hear these referred to as "as required" or "PRN".

#### Analgesics – "Pain killers"

Simple analgesics such as Paracetamol and anti-inflammatories such as Nurofen and Voltarin remain useful.

Opioids such as Morphine, Oxycodone, Fentanyl and Methadone are effective and safe when used appropriately.

Sometimes opioids are also effective for symptoms other than pain, such as shortness of breath and ongoing cough, and may be prescribed for that purpose.

People can sometime have concerns about opioids, including causing addiction, drowsiness or that 'there won't be anything left for later'. Taking opioids as prescribed will not cause addiction. They can cause drowsiness but we start people on small doses to help avoid this.

Sometimes when we increase doses, people can feel drowsy for a few days. A balance may be necessary between good pain control and some drowsiness. This will pass.

And there is always 'something left' to be tried. Usually there is room for increasing doses to a much higher level than might be expected. There are several different medications we can use if needed.

Opioids can cause side effects such as constipation or nausea. These can be managed or avoided and your prescriber will talk through this at the time.

#### Long acting VS Short acting

- Most long acting opioids last for 12 hours and are given twice a day, morning and night.

The aim is to keep pain under control.

- Short acting opioids last up to 4 hours. They are used as extras ("as required" or "PRN") to get pain under control i.e. in-between long acting pain medications.

#### Regular vs As Required medications

It is important to keep these separate and understand the difference between long acting and as needed medications. If you are unsure, speak with your pharmacist, doctor or community coordinator.

It is important to keep a list of 'as required' medications taken. This can help the team understand the symptoms and make a plan to ease or prevent them. This may include adjusting the long acting dose.

#### Nausea and Vomiting – Anti-emetics

Most Common

- Metoclopramide
- Ondansetron
- Haloperidol
- Levomepromazine
- Domperidone
- Cyclizine

Which anti-emetic chosen depends on the cause of the nausea and vomiting. Sometimes a combination is used for the greatest benefit.

#### Constipation

Laxatives are used when bowels are not working well.

As many opioids can have an effect on bowels, laxatives should always be prescribed. Which laxative chosen depends on the cause of the constipation. Sometimes a combination laxative may be used.

- Softeners: Docusate
- Stimulants: Senna, Bisacodyl
- Combinations: Laxsol, Coloxyl & Senna
- Osmotics: Lactulose, Molaxole, Lax-sachets, Movicol.
- Suppositories.

Most laxatives can also be bought over the counter but it is wise to review the cause with doctor or nurse to determine the best choice.

## Steroids

Steroids are used to reduce pain, swelling, nausea and fatigue.

- Steroids are usually taken in the morning, as can have an effect on sleeping
- Should not be taken in combination with an anti-inflammatory such as nurofen
- Do NOT stop taking steroids without advice.

## Anti-Anxiety Medication

These can be used to reduce panic and agitation, ease breathlessness, decrease or prevent seizures

- Clonazepam
- Lorazepam.
- Midazolam (Nasal Spray).

Side-Effects – Can cause fatigue or drowsiness.

## Regular (non-palliative) medication

You should continue your usual medications unless your prescribers tells you to stop.

## Syringe Drivers

Syringe drivers are a small portable device which holds a syringe containing the necessary medication and delivers it, via a small tube inserted under the skin, over a 24 hour period.

Syringe drivers are useful for delivering medications when they can no longer be taken by mouth.

## Medication Storage and Disposal

- Keep out of reach of children.
- Keep in a cool, dry place.
- Consider a locked cash box for opioids.
- Return unwanted/unused medication to your Pharmacy.
  - Sharps containers from your Pharmacy.

## Benefits of going to one Pharmacy

- Established relationship with your Pharmacist
- In a better position to help when things go wrong
- Clear and complete history
- Deliveries
- Compliance Aids

## Medication Management

Using medication aids really do make life easier:

- Blister or Roll Packs can be prepacked at pharmacy
  - Robot, Medico
- Refillable trays come in different sizes and can be filled by yourself weekly.
- Signing sheets may be supplied by your pharmacy to assist in keeping track.
- Pill cutters, crushers can make it easier to manage, but always check with pharmacist before using as some medications should not be cut or crushed
- Information leaflets are available on each of the medications prescribed.



You might like to listen to this topic on the Ending Life Well Podcast available on most podcast sites and on the Otago Community Hospice webpage.

