

BREATHLESSNESS AT END OF LIFE

Terminal Breathlessness is very frightening and must be treated as a serious symptom, untreated it can lead to escalation of symptoms, distress and terminal agitation

BREATHLESSNESS PRESENT

General Measures

Calm environment
Reassurance and support
Gentle air flow with fan (damp flannel around mouth)
Cool room
Give hourly mouth care
Oxygen if helpful/if patient Hypoxic

Use of Medication:

Patient not on opioid for pain

Give Diamorphine 2.5mg sub-cut stat
Prescribe hourly as needed for rescue dose
Start Diamorphine 10mg/24hours by syringe pump

Patient on Oral Morphine/Oramorph

Divide 24 hour total dose of current oral Morphine by 3 and prescribe this as Diamorphine (mgs) via syringe pump over 24 hours
Prescribe 1/6th of Diamorphine syringe pump dose for breakthrough/rescue medication to be given hourly if needed
Start syringe pump 4 hours before next oral opioid dose would have been due
Discontinue Oral Opioid

(The above mimics the pain flow chart. If patient is in pain and breathless DO NOT double doses)

Consider the following

If anxiety continues:

Midazolam 2.5mg sub-cut prn

If Bronchospasm is a significant factor:

Add in Inhaler/Nebs/Steroids

If Pulmonary Oedema present:

Furosemide (can be used s/c)

RISK OF BREATHLESSNESS

Planning Ahead

Patient Not on opioid for Pain

Prescribe Diamorphine 2.5mg sub-cut hourly if needed
Consider Midazolam 2.5mg sub-cut hourly if anxiety is likely to occur

Review within 24 hours

If 2 or more doses needed, manage as for breathless patient

Review within 24 hours

If >2 rescue doses needed in 24 hours

Increase the medication in the syringe driver
A combination of Diamorphine and Midazolam may be needed
Continue rescue doses hourly as needed
Increase rescue dose of chosen drug to 5mg and continue hourly as needed

Continue to review regularly

Modify syringe pump doses as needed, guided by rescue medication used

DO NOT STRUGGLE: SEEK HELP

If symptoms persist or you need help contact the Palliative Care Team or Severn Hospice Tel: 01743 236 565