

SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

Saliva problems are common amongst neurodegenerative disorders such as Motor Neuron Disease, Parkinsons Disease and Multiple Sclerosis for which pharmacists may play a role in the treatment.

Problems with Saliva

We met Magda in last month's pharmacy update ([Case10 Part1 \(219kb pdf\)](#)). Magda has excessive thin watery saliva, a symptom of her Motor Neuron Disease and was commenced on non- pharmacological treatments. Unfortunately these have not been sufficient to control her saliva and pharmacological options are being reviewed.

Pharmacological Management

- > Consider a trial of anticholinergic medicine.

Cautions:

- > Anticholinergics will dry and thicken up secretions (overly thick secretions can be problematic also)
- > Elderly patients are more sensitive to cognitive and behavioural changes, falls, urinary retention and constipation secondary to anticholinergics.

First line options

1. Atropine 1% eye drops

Dilute 1mL to 100mL of water and use as a mouth rinse up to three times a day.

- > For patients unable to physically rinse their mouth, 2 to 3 drops can be administered sublingually up to 3 times a day.

OR

2. Ipratropium bromide 22 micrograms/ nasal spray

Use one-two sprays 3 to 4 times a day under the tongue, 30min before meals (according to timing of saliva problems).

- > The nasal spray is available over the counter.

Second line options

1. Amitriptyline 10mg tablet

Administer one tablet at night, up to a maximum of 20mg at night

- > Contraindicated if the patient has nocturnal xerostomia or if sedation is considered unacceptable
- > In the presence of swallowing difficulties the tablet can be crushed- note unpleasant taste.

OR

2. Hyoscine Butylbromide 10mg tablet

Administer one to two tablets three to four times a day.

- > The tablets are difficult to dissolve and hyoscine butylbromide ampules may be administered orally, in presence of swallowing difficulties. (Streamlined Authority available for palliative care)

Useful resources

- > Motor Neurone Disease Australia. [Saliva management \[Internet\]](#). 2017 [cited 2017 Mar 28].

For more information

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This update is intended to provide practical up to date and factual information relating to pharmacy and medicines management in the setting of Palliative Care and is based on critical review of available evidence. Individual patient circumstances must be considered when applying this information. Please feel free to distribute this update further to interested colleagues.

