

SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

Opioid induced constipation can occur in up to 70% of cancer patients. Standard of care includes prophylactic laxatives when strong opioids are used regularly, however the combination product of Slow Release (SR) oxycodone *plus* naloxone (Targin®) has recently been gaining use for this indication.

Is Targin® the effective answer?

The naloxone component in Targin® is active in the gastrointestinal tract, antagonising opioid receptors of the gut to reduce opioid induced constipation. As oral naloxone undergoes extensive first-pass metabolism, negligible amounts of naloxone enter systemic circulation and thus analgesic effects of oxycodone are unaffected.

The combination product is proposed to be superior to using oxycodone SR with laxatives in preventing constipation.

What does the evidence say?

The National Prescribing Service (NPS) have reviewed the evidence. Concerns have been raised as to the methods of the trials including;

- > Patients with cancer pain were not included.
- > Small numbers with large drop outs.
- > Potential for patients with more severe constipation to be excluded during the run-in period.
- > Previous use of laxatives not described (may not have been using laxatives optimally).
- > Rescue bisacodyl doses and frequency were not described or statistically compared.
- > Statistical significance was not reported for all reports i.e. no p-value provided.

Key points

- > The methods used make it difficult to apply the results to a population of cancer patients or to those who have been advised to use regular laxatives.
- > Naloxone may reduce but not eliminate opioid induced constipation.
- > Improvements were greater in patients with a history of opioid induced constipation.

Are there safety concerns?

The update next month will describe some local cases where safety issues have been identified in cancer patients.

Useful resources

- > [Oxycodone-with-naloxone controlled-release tablets \(Targin\) for chronic severe pain](#). NPS RADAR [Internet]. 2011 Oct 25 [cited 2015 Nov 27].
- > CareSearch. [Constipation \[Internet\]](#). Adelaide: CareSearch; 2015 [cited 2015 Nov 27].

For more information

Contact the Advanced Practice Pharmacists:

- > **Josephine To, Northern**
Josephine.to@sa.gov.au 8161 2499
- > **Michaela del Campo, Central**
Michaela.delcampo@sa.gov.au 8222 6305
- > **Paul Tait, Southern**
paul.tait@sa.gov.au 8275 1732

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