

# SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

In recognising the carer's role and the additional stresses that this may cause, pharmacists can be a reliable resource for this valuable population.

## Supporting Carers

Carlisa is well-known to you and your staff. She is 23 years old and is the primary carer for her mother who has recently been diagnosed with cancer of the liver. Her mother is struggling with pain and Carlisa is collecting two new medications for her mother:

- > Controlled release morphine 10 mg twice a day, and
- > Morphine syrup 2mg prn.

Carlisa wants to minimise her mother's reliance on analgesics after watching her brother "become addicted to pain killers".

## Informal carers

While some people with a life-limiting illness will manage their medications autonomously, there are many who will rely on support from informal carers at some point of their illness.

An informal carer is someone who provides unpaid support to family members or friends. For many, the role will evolve over time and for others it will be forced upon them, during a crisis.

Research shows the availability of a supportive carer is a strong predictor of someone being able to remain at home to die, if this is their wish. Carer fatigue and inability to cope are leading causes for unplanned admissions to hospitals.

## Opioids and addiction

There is strong evidence for the use of opioids to manage moderate to severe cancer pain to improve function and quality of life. In this setting addiction is not an issue. Yet, Carlisa's previous experience with and reluctance to use opioids may adversely affect how well her mother's pain can be managed.

Palliative Care Australia has developed two resources that discuss the use of morphine and opioids:

- > [Facts about morphine and other opioid medications in palliative care](#); and
- > [Learn more about pain management \(599kb pdf\)](#)

If needed, arrangements can be put in place to monitor medication use while managing her mother's symptoms:

- > Establish a system ([chart \(31kb pdf\)](#) or diary note) for Carlisa to record the frequency of morphine syrup use and the dose effects (e.g. improves pain);
- > Reassure Carlisa that the combination of long-acting and short-acting opioids will provide better control of her mother's pain;
- > Recommend a Home Medicines Review (HMR) for Carlisa's mother, particularly if she is on multiple medications; and
- > If there are concerns about having too much medication in the house, staged supply can be used.

The next update will explore financial supports available to carers.

## Useful resources

- > CareSearch. [Patients and Carers](#)
- > Palliative Care [Therapeutic Guidelines](#) 3rd Ed:
  - o Community care - links to "Caregivers"
  - o Pain

## For more information

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This update is intended to provide practical up to date and factual information relating to pharmacy and medications 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.

