Symptom Management in the Terminal Phase: Turning Challenges into Opportunities

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Introduction

Symptoms can be anticipated in the terminal phase. How these symptoms are managed, influences the patient’s comfort, level of carer stress and therefore, their ability to die in their home. General practitioners (GPs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) and are well placed to lead care into the terminal phase. Prescribing for terminal phase symptoms in advance (i.e. anticipatory prescribing) is good practice as this facilitates good communication between the multidisciplinary healthcare team: nurses, pharmacists and carers. This allows the patient to be given medicines as needed without any delay, thus avoiding unnecessary stress and escalation of care. Launched in May 2017, palliAGED Symptoms and Medicines pages provide a gateway for healthcare providers to evidence-based resources to support prescribing in the terminal phase. Changes in availability of external resources prompted a discussion within the palliAGED Team. This project examined the currency and suitability of the palliAGED Symptoms and Medicines pages, with the aim of improving the content and the framework in which the information is presented.

Method

The review was undertaken by four members of the palliAGED Team who had been involved with previous iterations of this resource. The team defined four guiding principles:
- Improve the linkages between the Symptoms pages and the Medicines Management pages
- Improve the connectivity with the palliAGEDgp smartphone application
- Ensure the content matches the current evidence
- Emphasise freely-available Australian peer-reviewed information.

A draft containing the Symptoms and Medicines information was compiled by the team, guided by these principles.

Discussion

For many healthcare providers, care for older people in the terminal phase will represent a small component of their workload. As such, reliable access to evidence-based and relevant resources is paramount in assisting with symptom management in the terminal phase. This review has realigned palliative care support resources to provide consistent advice.

Resources

- Anxiety
- Dyspnoea
- Nausea and Vomiting
- Pain
- Respiratory Secretions
- Terminal Restlessness

Medicines Management

- Dysphagia
- Off-Label Prescribing
- Opioids: Switching between Formulations
- Subcutaneous Medicine Administration

Evidence

www.palliaged.com.au

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