

SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

Medicines used in the last days of life (terminal phase) may need combining within a syringe, when administered over 24 hours. Identifying compatibility issues is an important role for pharmacists.

Bill

Doris, a nurse from the local community nursing organisation, calls the pharmacy. She is with Bill, who is imminently dying. The GP has a prescription for three injectable medicines and Doris is calling to confirm if you have them in stock: clonazepam 1mg/mL, morphine 10mg/mL and dexamethasone 4mg/mL.

Bill is a 94 years old war hero and has been coming to your pharmacy for as long as you can remember. While the call takes you by surprise, you know prescriptions for injectable opioids and benzodiazepines are a flag for deteriorating health.

You have each of the medicines in stock. As Doris obtains your fax details, she asks you if these medicines are compatible in a syringe.

Compatibility

A previous [update \(587kb pdf\)](#) discussed issues around the compatibility of medicines within a syringe.

A quick search of the free online [Syringe Driver Compatibilities \(704kb pdf\)](#) document identifies that there is nil information relating to the combination of clonazepam, morphine and dexamethasone within a single syringe

Dexamethasone

Dexamethasone is incompatible with many medicines, when mixed within a syringe for a period of time. This combination would likely fall out of solution and would be dangerous to administer. Fortunately, because of its

long duration of action, dexamethasone can be administered as a bolus subcutaneous injection, thus separating it from the clonazepam and morphine. Other medicines with a long duration of action which could be administered as a subcutaneous bolus include frusemide, methadone and clonazepam.

Doris is grateful and confirms when the subcutaneous medicines will be ready as she “needs to educate the family on how to administer them”. In the next update, there will be a discussion of a new Australian resource to support caregivers to administer medicines to people at home in the terminal phase.

Useful Resources

- > Eastern Metropolitan Region Palliative Care Consortium [Syringe driver drug compatibilities - Guide to Palliative Care Practice 2016 v3 \(May 2016\)\(704kb pdf\)](#)
- > Local Medicines Information Service (SA Pharmacy Meds Info 8161 7555)
- > Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia - [Australian Injectable Drugs Handbook 7th ed](#)

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.

