

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 to be administered by untrained carers. An Australian resource has been developed to teach carers to administer subcutaneous medicines for breakthrough symptoms.

Enablers of a home death

In the previous [update \(150kb pdf\)](#), subcutaneous medications to manage Bill's symptoms were prescribed and dispensed. Claire, his carer, has collected the medicines.

For people like Bill who wish to spend their last days at home, symptom control and advance care planning are essential.

Symptom control is often delivered using a continuous subcutaneous infusion (CSCI), which is set up by a registered nurse (RN). In addition, bolus doses will be prescribed to manage breakthrough symptoms. While Doris and her team of RNs will visit Bill daily to assess and replace the CSCI, it is likely that breakthrough doses will be required between visits.

With adequate information and resources, carers can be taught to safely give bolus doses. For many carers, the role of administering medicines offers a sense of control and responsibility.

To support Bill, Doris will teach Claire to:

- > Identify Bill's breakthrough symptoms and to select the best medicine;
- > Document Bill's breakthrough symptom and its severity;
- > Measure the correct dose, using a metric syringe;
- > Label the syringe;
- > Administer the medicine to Bill; and
- > Document the response to the medicine.

The Australian [Caring@Home](#) Project has produced a suite of standardised resources to assist RNs with this role; implementation is scheduled to occur throughout 2019.

This kit is designed to be provided to the person and their carer(s), following the face to face training. It includes:

- > A written reference resource, with step by step instructions;
- > A medicines diary to record the breakthrough symptom, the dose administered and the response;
- > A practical demonstration kit;
- > A colour coded symptoms and medicines chart;
- > Several short training videos on a USB stick; and
- > A sharps container.

The scope of these resources is limited to the administration of subcutaneous medicines in the last days of life. Other resources may be needed to support the carer around other issues relating to their caring role.

Useful Resources

- > [Patients, Carers and Families \(CareSearch\)](#)

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.

