

Guidance for family or friends on giving medication

People who are seriously ill and nearing the end of their life may be best cared for in their own homes. As their illness gets worse, they may find it difficult to take medicines by mouth because they are becoming too weak or too sleepy to swallow. Some drugs can get into the body through the lining of the mouth: others need an injection.

In this situation, family and friends can be supported to give medications by injection or onto the lining of the mouth to keep patients as comfortable as possible should a doctor or nurse not be available. This is completely legal: if you are happy to take on this role, you will be trained by a healthcare professional on how to recognise the symptoms that need treating and how to give the medications. **You should only give injections if you have been trained by a healthcare professional to do so. It is important that you feel supported to undertake this care.**

Sometimes the patient dies shortly after they have been given medication. It is very important that you are clear that these two things are not related, and the medication has not ended their life. At the doses used, the drugs will not hasten the end of life.

Please refer to the written instructions of what drugs and doses are suitable for your situation, including the maximum number of doses to be given in a 24-hour period.

If possible, please check with a GP or Nurse before giving medications. During normal working hours phone your GP practice or your District Nurse via 0330 726 0077. At other times phone NHS 111 and select option 4. You can also phone the Cambridge Arthur Rank Hospice on 01223 675900 or Peterborough Thorpe Hall Hospice on 01733 225900. Should there be a delay in getting in contact with them, it is fine to go ahead to give the medications, but please make sure that you let a doctor or nurse know afterwards.

Common drugs and doses used will vary between people: what is suitable for the patient will be clearly written on the medication chart by the doctor or nurse. These drugs are commonly:

Shortness of breath: Morphine (or Oxycodone) under the tongue or by injection

Agitation / panic: Midazolam (or Lorazepam) under the tongue or by injection

Agitation / confusion: Levomepromazine (or Haloperidol) by injection

Respiratory secretions: Glycopyrronium (or Hyoscine butylbromide) by injection

Record on the medication chart the drug(s) and doses given and the time. It may take up to one hour for the medication to help: also record whether the symptom(s) are better after giving the drug(s). If, in that hour, the symptom(s) for which you have given the medication are getting worse, are not getting better, or if you are worried for any reason, call the healthcare team above straight away. The doctor or nurse may be able to assess the situation over the phone, or may arrange for someone to visit to see why the medication is not working.

Online guidance on giving these medications is available at <https://subcut.helixcentre.com> and <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfPD5ilcfEbiCCLrYnleFLrk2aGO8f4f>

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