

# Guidance from Wessex End of Life Network's Specialist Palliative Care Practitioner Reference Group following the Gosport War Memorial Hospital Independent Panel Report

In response to the Gosport report, a regional group of palliative care specialists has met to discuss and consider how to support professionals in delivering palliative and end of life care.

Gosport has raised concerns about the use of medications and syringe drivers at the end of life. This fact sheet aims to clarify best practice for professionals.

## Tips for best practice/potential pitfalls

Following reflection on the key concerns in the report The Reference Group has made the following recommendations:

- 1) Opioids are of immense value, their appropriate use for symptoms such as pain or breathlessness can transform patients' comfort and well-being at the end of life.

**The rationale for prescribing or giving opioids should be considered and documented.**
- 2) The provision of anticipatory medications is designed to enable rapid relief of symptoms at whatever time the patient develops distressing symptoms.

**When prescribing anticipatory medications, start with an appropriate dose and range according to local guidance and individual patient.**
- 3) Changing circumstances can require medications to be delivered by a different route or converted to a different drug during end of life care.

**When changing route or drug, start with an appropriate dose according to local guidance and individual patient – opioid conversion charts are available in the 'Green Book'.**
- 4) Prescribing should be individualised to the patient and circumstances.

**Local and national guidelines, as well as specialist advice, are available to support professionals to provide effective and safe palliative and end of life care.**



# Support for Professionals

## 1) The Palliative Care Handbook, A Good Practice Guide, compiled by Wessex Palliative Physicians

This handbook, commonly referred to as 'The Green Book', contains advice on clinical assessment and management in palliative care as well as guidance to support best practice with opioid conversions and prescribing.

[www.hampshirehospitals.nhs.uk/application/files/2915/6898/0952/GB\\_9th\\_edition\\_\\_2019.pdf](http://www.hampshirehospitals.nhs.uk/application/files/2915/6898/0952/GB_9th_edition__2019.pdf)

## 2) Specialist Palliative Care Team

Please contact your local hospice.

In some circumstances, you may feel specialist advice would be appropriate. Common topics of discussion include:

- **Escalating doses of medication**  
(also see Green Book: Golden Rules, Pain and Syringe Driver chapters)
- **Opioid conversions at higher doses (including transdermal patches)**  
(also see Green Book: Pain chapter)
- **Prescribing in renal impairment**  
(also see Green Book: Renal Impairment chapter)

## 3) Suggested audit template.

We have produced an **audit template** which you are free to use to allow you to audit your practice.

## Useful resources for professionals and patients

NICE guideline QS144 Care of dying adults in the last days of life:

[www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs144](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs144)

NHS choices website for information on palliative care, controlling pain and other symptoms:

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/end-of-life-care](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/end-of-life-care)

Age UK, lets talk about death and dying video and booklet:

<http://bit.ly/2ML1aNd>

Marie Curie website for information about syringe drivers:

[www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/terminal-illness/medication-pain-relief/syringe-drivers](http://www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/terminal-illness/medication-pain-relief/syringe-drivers)