

# Symptom management for adult patients with Covid-19 receiving end of life supportive care OUTSIDE of the ICU

Adapted from the BC Centre for Palliative Care Guidelines & associated documents by Dr Alison Blight\* with additional input from Palliative Care clinicians – many thanks  
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**BEFORE enacting these recommendations PLEASE clarify patient's GOALS OF CARE these recommendations are consistent with: NFR, no ICU transfer, comfort-focused supportive care**

**Patient NOT already taking opioids ("opioid-naive")**



## OPIOIDS

(ALL relieve dyspnoea & can be helpful for cough - *codeine is not recommended*)

Opioids help relieve acute respiratory distress & agitation, contribute to energy conservation

Begin at low end of range for frail elderly

Start with PRN \*but\* low threshold to advance to q4h/q6h scheduled dosing. Regular dosing may also be preferred to rationalise use of PPE.

Avoid PRN = "Patient Receives Nothing"

## MORPHINE

2.5 - 5 mg PO (lower dose if frail/elderly) \*OR\* 1-2mg IV (ONLY in the Emergency Dept) or 2.5mg SC q1h PRN (IV/SC can be q30min PRN), if >6 PRN in 24h, Dr to review

## HYDROMORPHONE

(Use especially if eGFR <30)

0.5 - 1 mg PO \*OR\* 0.2-0.4mg IV (ONLY in the Emergency Dept) or 0.25 - 0.5 mg SC q1h PRN (IV/SC can be q30min PRN), if >6 PRN in 24h, Dr to review

## TITRATE UP AS NEEDED

If using >4 PRNs in 24h, consider dosing at q4h REGULARLY (q6h for frail elderly) \*and\* continue a PRN dose.

## DO NOT USE NEBULISED MEDICATIONS

If inhalers such as salbutamol or ipratropium are to be used, use MDIs with spacers.

**Patient already taking opioids**



Continue previous opioid, consider increasing by 25%

To manage breakthrough symptoms:  
Start opioid PRN at 10% of total daily (24h) regular opioid dose  
Give PRN: q1h PRN if PO, q30min if SC

See below guidelines/references\*\* for conversion between opioids

For further assistance including telephone support please contact your local Palliative Care team

## Respiratory secretions / congestion near end-of-life

Advise family & bedside staff: not usually uncomfortable, just noisy, due to patient weakness/not able to clear secretions. Repositioning of patient often helps most.

Consider: hyoscine butylbromide (Buscopan) 10-20mg SC q4h PRN or glycopyrrolate 0.4mg SC q4h PRN \*OR\* atropine 1% (*ophthalmic drops*) 1 - 2 drops SL q4h PRN

If able - Ipratropium MDI *with spacer* 21mcg/dose 2-4 puffs qid (reg or PRN).

If severe consider furosemide 20-40mg IV/SC q2h PRN & monitor response.

Avoid suctioning (esp deep) due to mucosal trauma and stimulating gagging or more secretions. If absolutely needed use soft tubing (y-suction catheter) suctioning sparingly.

Also consider:

**COUGH:** PO solution e.g. pholcodeine OR for congestion/phlegm bromhexine

**NAUSEA:** metoclopramide 10mg tds PO/SC or haloperidol 0.5mg tds PO/SC

**CONSTIPATION:** Sennosides/Movicol/Osmolax/Glycerine+Bisacodyl supps etc

**Engage with your team to ensure comfort is the priority as patients approach end of life. Please ensure written orders reflect this. Unmanaged symptoms at time of death will add to distress of patients, family members & bedside staff.**

These recommendations are for reference and do not supersede clinical judgement. Attempts have been made to decrease complexity to allow barrier-free use in multiple settings.

Evidence supports that appropriate opioid doses do not hasten death in other conditions like advanced cancer or COPD; dosing should be reassessed as patient's condition or goals of care change.

\*\*Opioid conversion info: <https://fpm.anzca.edu.au/documents/opioid-dose-equivalence.pdf>

Palliative Care eTG: <https://tgldcdp.tg.org.au.acs.hcn.com.au/topicTeaser?guidelinePage=Palliative+Care&etgAccess=true>

BC Guidelines: <https://bc-cpc.ca/cpc/publications/symptom-management-guidelines/>

UpToDate chapter: <https://www.uptodate.com.acs.hcn.com.au/contents/discussing-serious-news?search=communicating%20serious%20news> (needs login)

Serious Illness Conversation Guide: <http://www.instituteforhumancaring.org/documents/Providers/PSJH-Serious-Illness-Conversation-Guide.pdf>

US Centre for Advanced Palliative Care Covid-19 resource link: <https://www.capc.org/toolkits/covid-19-response-resources/>