

# BREATHLESSNESS AT END OF LIFE

Terminal Breathlessness is very frightening and must be treated as a serious symptom, untreated it can lead to escalation of symptoms, distress and terminal agitation

## BREATHLESSNESS PRESENT

### General Measures

Calm environment  
Reassurance and support  
Gentle air flow with fan (damp flannel around mouth)  
Cool room  
Give hourly mouth care  
Oxygen if helpful/if patient Hypoxic

### Use of Medication:

#### Patient not on opioid for pain

Give Diamorphine 2.5mg sub-cut stat  
Prescribe hourly as needed for rescue dose  
Start Diamorphine 10mg/24hours by syringe pump

#### Patient on Oral Morphine/Oramorph

Divide 24 hour total dose of current oral Morphine by 3 and prescribe this as Diamorphine (mgs) via syringe pump over 24 hours  
Prescribe 1/6<sup>th</sup> of Diamorphine syringe pump dose for breakthrough/rescue medication to be given hourly if needed  
Start syringe pump 4 hours before next oral opioid dose would have been due  
Discontinue Oral Opioid

(The above mimics the pain flow chart. If patient is in pain and breathless DO NOT double doses)

### Consider the following

#### If anxiety continues:

Midazolam 2.5mg sub-cut prn

#### If Bronchospasm is a significant factor:

Add in Inhaler/Nebs/Steroids

#### If Pulmonary Oedema present:

Furosemide (can be used s/c)

## RISK OF BREATHLESSNESS

### Planning Ahead

#### Patient Not on opioid for Pain

Prescribe Diamorphine 2.5mg sub-cut hourly if needed  
Consider Midazolam 2.5mg sub-cut hourly if anxiety is likely to occur

### Review within 24 hours

If 2 or more doses needed, manage as for breathless patient

### Review within 24 hours

#### If >2 rescue doses needed in 24 hours

Increase the medication in the syringe driver  
A combination of Diamorphine and Midazolam may be needed  
Continue rescue doses hourly as needed  
Increase rescue dose of chosen drug to 5mg and continue hourly as needed

### Continue to review regularly

Modify syringe pump doses as needed, guided by rescue medication used

**DO NOT STRUGGLE: SEEK HELP**

If symptoms persist or you need help contact the Palliative Care Team or Severn Hospice Tel: 01743 236 565