Comfort Care Symptom Management Guide – End of Life

**DYSPNEA**

**Assessment**
- Use “RDOS” respiratory distress scale to assess in a non-verbal patient
- Rely on opioids for comfort

**Non-pharmacologic interventions**
- Positioning (sit up)

**Medical management**
- See “How to Dose Opioids”
- Add benzodiazepine if opioid alone is ineffective
- Oxygen per COVID Comfort Care Order Set

**PAIN**

**Assessment**
- Use “NPAT pain scale” to assess in a non-verbal patient
- Rely heavily on opioids for comfort

**Medical management**
- See “How to Dose Opioids”

**SECRETIONS**

**Assessment**
- May not be distressing to patient
- Reposition/suction

**Medical management**
- Glycopyrrolate 0.2 mg IV/SQ q4H PRN

**AGITATION/DELIRIUM/ANXIETY**

**Assessment**
- Evaluate for other causes of distress (dyspnea, pain, urinary retention, constipation, etc.)

**Medical management**
- Lorazepam 2 mg q4 PRN anxiety, first-line.
- Halol 5 mg q4 PRN agitation/delirium, first-line.
- If refractory, Thorazine 50 mg IV Q6 PRN or page palliative medicine

**HOW TO DOSE OPIOIDS**
- Avoid morphine/hydromorphone in renal failure
- If already on opioids but uncontrolled symptoms, increase dose 25-50%
- Use PRN meds for acute distress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Morphine IV/SQ</th>
<th>Hydromorphone IV/SQ</th>
<th>Fentanyl IV/SQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mg/Mcg</strong></td>
<td>5 mg</td>
<td>1 mg</td>
<td>100 mcg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- If uncontrolled in 5 min, increase to:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morphine IV/SQ</th>
<th>Hydromorphone IV/SQ</th>
<th>Fentanyl IV/SQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 mg</td>
<td>1.5 mg</td>
<td>150 mcg</td>
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- If uncontrolled in 5 min, increase to:
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 mg</td>
<td>2 mg</td>
<td>200 mcg</td>
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- If uncontrolled in 5 min, page palliative medicine
- Once a dose controls dyspnea/pain, order this dose q5 min PRN

**SIGNS OF ACTIVE DYING**

**Hours-to-days**
- Delirium, agitation or unresponsiveness
- Lack of appetite or energy
- Oliguria
- Terminal secretions
- Pulselessness of radial artery

**Minutes-to-Hours**
- Mottling of skin/cool extremities
- Apneic periods
- Cheyne-Stokes breathing

**STARTING CONTINUOUS OPIOID INFUSIONS**
- See comfort care order set for recommended starting doses

Developed by the Department of Palliative and Supportive Care, Taussig Cancer Institute