Palliative Care for COVID-19

Relief of Dyspnea

Non-Pharmacologic Interventions:
- Bring patient upright or to sitting position
- Consider mindfulness, mindful breathing

Pharmacologic Interventions:
- Opioids are treatment of choice for refractory dyspnea
- For symptomatic patients, using PRN or bolus dosing titrated to relief is more effective and safe compared to starting an opioid infusion

Dosing Tips:
- For opioid naïve patients
  - PO Morphine 5-10 mg
  - PO Oxycodone 5 mg
  - PO Hydromorphone 1-2 mg
  - IV/SC Morphine 2-4 mg
  - IV/SC Hydromorphone 0.4-0.6 mg

  For severe cough, Hydrocodone/homatropine liquid 5-1.5 mg/5 ML, give 5 mL po q4 hours prn cough

Opioid Quick Tips

Pharmacodynamics of Opioids:
- Time to peak effect / Duration of Action
  - PO Opioids: 30-60 minutes / 3-4 hours
  - IV Opioids: 5-15 minutes / 3-4 hours
- Time to peak effect is the same for analgesia, relief of dyspnea, and sedation

Other Opioid Principles:
- If initial dose of IV opioid is ineffective after 2 doses at least 15 minutes apart, double the dose
- Typically need 6-8 hours of controlled symptoms to calculate a continuous opioid infusion
- If starting a continuous infusion, do not change more often than every 6 hours. Adjust infusion dose based on the 24 hour sum of PRNs

Relative Strengths & Conversion Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opioid Agent</th>
<th>Oral Dose</th>
<th>IV Dose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morphine</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxycodone</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydromorphone</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Avoid fentanyl due to shortage

If Using Opioids, Start a Bowel Regimen:
- Goal is 1 BM QD or QOD, no straining
- Senna S 2 tabs q HS, can increase to 4 tabs BID
- Bisacodyl 10 mg suppository if no BM in 48 hrs
- IF patient with prognosis hours to days, no bowel regimen indicated
### Communication Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What They Say</th>
<th>What You Say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How bad is this?</td>
<td>From the information I have now, your loved one’s situation is serious enough that your loved one should be in the hospital. <strong>We will know more over the next day</strong>, and we will update you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is my mother going to make it?</td>
<td>I imagine you are scared. Here’s what I can say: because she is 70, and is already dealing with other medical problems it is quite possible that she will not make it out of the hospital. Honestly, it is too soon to say for certain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shouldn’t she be in an intensive care unit?</td>
<td>You/your loved one’s situation does not meet criteria for the ICU right now. We are supporting her with treatments (oxygen) to relieve her shortness of breath and we are closely monitoring her condition. <strong>We will provide all the available treatment we have that will help her and we’ll keep in touch with you by phone.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happens if she gets sicker?</td>
<td>If she gets sicker, we will continue to do our best to support her with oxygen and medicines for her breathing. If she gets worse despite those best treatments, she will be evaluating for her likelihood of benefiting from treatment with a ventilator. I can see that you really care about her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can you just take her off a ventilator when her life depends on it?</td>
<td>Unfortunately her condition has gotten worse, even though we are doing everything. She is dying now and the ventilator is not helping her to improve as we had hoped. This means that we need to take her off the ventilator to make sure she has a peaceful death and does not suffer. I wish things were different.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Resuscitation Status COVID-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach to when your clinical judgment is that a patient would not benefit from resuscitation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If in agreement:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If not in agreement:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### When/How to Call for Help

**888-404-1539 or 877-435-7219 (HELP-C19)**

*We are here to help. We’ve got your back.*

In addition to typical circumstances and consults, please consult us if:

- Patient in respiratory distress and not getting comfortable with initial efforts

### Additional Resources


Download these apps (Google Play or App Store) for more palliative care resources:

- VitalTalk Tips (Communication)
- Fast Facts (Symptom Management)