



Northern Health Palliative Care

Top 5 Drugs - A Palliative Care Royal Flush

There are many physiological changes that occur at end of life. The 'Top 5 Drugs – A Palliative Care Royal Flush' treat the most commonly seen symptoms at end-of-life:

- Dyspnea
- Anxiety
- Worsening Pain
- Delirium
- Terminal Respiratory Secretions
- Nausea

Atropine - End of life secretions ✓

- Contraindications: Narrow-angle glaucoma, obstructive uropathy, reflux esophagitis
- Dose: **Terminal respiratory congestion** – Atropine 1% ophthalmic solution, 2 drops q1h PRN sublingual or buccal or, Atropine 0.4-0.8 SC q4h & q1h PRN
- Side effects: Blurred vision, tachycardia, dry mouth, constipation, urinary retention, flushing, dysphagia

Dexamethasone – Pain ✓ Nausea/Vomiting ✓

- Contraindications: Systemic fungal infections, concurrent use of NSAID's
- Dose: **Anti-emetic** 4-8 mg PO/SC daily, **Pain Adjuvant** 4-8 mg PO/SC daily
- Side effects: Hyperglycemia, insomnia, euphoria, GI irritation, increased appetite, fluid retention, delayed wound healing

Haloperidol - Agitation/Delirium ✓ Nausea/Vomiting ✓

- Contraindications: Parkinson's, severe cardiovascular disease, severe CNS depression
- Dose: Parenteral dose is 50% of oral dose
Anti-emetic – 0.5-2.5 mg PO/SC QID,
Delirium (mild) 0.5-1.5 mg PO t.i.d.
(moderate) 1.5-5 mg PO/SC q30
(severe) – 5-10 mg SC q30 mins until relief
- Side effects: Extrapyramidal effects, sedation, hypotension

Methotrimeprazine - Terminal agitation ✓ delirium ✓ Intractable pain ✓ Nausea/Vomiting ✓

- Contraindications: CNS depression, severe hepatic or cardiac disease, hematologic disorders
- Dose: **Parenteral dose is 50% of oral dose**
Terminal agitation / delirium – (mild) 10-15 mg PO/SC q4-6h
(severe) 10-50 PO/SC q30 min until relief, then 10-50 mg PO/SC q4-8h
Anti-emetic - 6.25-25 mg PO/SC q4-24h,
- Side effects: Sedation, postural hypotension, tachycardia, dry mouth, constipation

Hydromorphone – Moderate – Severe pain ✓ Breathlessness ✓

- Contraindications: hypersensitivity to the medication
- Dose: Parenteral dose is 50% of oral dose
Analgesia/Breathlessness – Starting dose for opioid-naïve 0.5 -1 mg PO q4h with breakthrough ordered at 0.25-0.5 mg PO q1h PRN
- Side effects: Nausea/vomiting, drowsiness, constipation, dry mouth

References:

- Micromedex
- UpToDate
- Hospice Palliative Care Symptom Guidelines, 2008 , 2nd Ed.
- Palliative Care Formulary – Canadian Edition