Palliative Care Tips

Issue #8  Pain Management

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Pain Management is required in about 70% of cancer patients; however, some cancer patients will never require analgesics.

**Analgesics in Common Use**

1. Mild to moderate pain: Acetaminophen; Codeine
2. Severe pain: Morphine; Hydromorphone, Oxycodeone; Transdermal Fentanyl; Methadone
3. Adjuvant analgesics: NSAIDS; Tricyclic antidepressants, anticonvulsants, steroids, oral local anesthetics

**Alternate Routes:** Oral; subcutaneous; rectal; transdermal; intravenous

**Other Modalities**

1. Anesthetic procedures, eg: celiac plexus block
2. Radiotherapy
3. Surgery, eg: stabilize the pathological fracture
4. TENS, acupuncture, biofeedback/relaxation therapy, Physio/OT, etc.
5. Bisphosphonates

**Basic Management**

1. PRN dosing alone often appropriate for intermittent pain, initial dose titration, or renal failure
2. Continuous pain use regular around the clock regimen with rescue dose available (10% of 24 hour dose)
3. Use short-acting opioid for titration until pain control stabilized
4. Only use long-acting opioids when pain control achieved
5. Regular laxative regimen almost always essential
6. Metoclopramide/Domperidone for opioid-induced nausea

**Common Issues/Complications**

1. Understand tolerance and addiction as separate and uncommon problems
2. For opioid-induced myoclonus/confusion switch opioids
3. Use conversion table to calculate dose for opioid switch
4. Avoid misdiagnosis of delirium as increasing pain (especially if opioid-induced as vicious cycle soon escalates)
5. Avoid polypharmacy - adjuvant analgesia unnecessary if opioid along effective and vice versa
6. Avoid Meperidine due to side effects with chronic use
7. Avoid agonist-antagonists, eg: Pentazocine

**High Risk Factors in Pain Control:**
- Neuropathic Pain Syndrome
- Incident Pain
- Psychosocial and Spiritual Distress
- Chemical coping with alcohol or substance abuse
- Cognitive Impairment

**REMEMBER:** For referrals, questions, or telephone consultations call 496-1300 weekdays and weekends.

Palliative Care Tips are now available on our Website: www.palliative.org