

# Symptom management for adult patients with COVID-19 receiving end-of-life supportive care outside of the ICU

adapted from BC Centre for Palliative Care Guidelines\* with input from Palliative Care MDs & pharmacists. Thank you to all who contributed!

**BEFORE enacting these recommendations PLEASE identify patient's LEVEL OF INTERVENTION**  
these recommendations are consistent with: DNR, no ICU transfer, comfort-focused supportive care

Suggested tools to assist with conversation:

From Seattle MDs: COVID-19 Conversation Tips (<http://bit.ly/SeattleVitalTalkCOVID19>)

Serious Illness Conversation Guide (<http://bit.ly/SeriousIllnessConversationGuide>)

Communicating Serious News (UpToDate; requires login <http://bit.ly/CommunicatingSeriousNews>)

**All below are STARTING doses. COVID-19 symptoms may advance quickly. Be prepared to escalate dosing.**

*Consider dose ranges to give frontline staff capacity for urgent clinical decision-making as needed.*

**Patient NOT already taking opioids ("opioid-naive")**

## OPIOIDS

(ALL relieve dyspnea & can be helpful for cough - *codeine is not recommended*)

**Opioids help relieve acute respiratory distress & agitation, contribute to energy conservation**

Begin at low end of range for frail elderly

**Start with PRN \*but\* low threshold to advance to q4h / q6h scheduled dosing: Avoid PRN = "Patient Receives Nothing"**

## MORPHINE

2.5 - 5 mg PO \*OR\* 1 - 2 mg SQ / IV  
q1h PRN (SQ / IV can be q30min PRN),  
if >6 PRN in 24h, MD to review

## HYDROMORPHONE

0.5 - 1 mg PO \*OR\* 0.25 - 0.5 mg SQ / IV  
q1h PRN (SQ / IV can be q30min PRN),  
if >6 PRN in 24h, MD to review

## PLEASE TITRATE UP AS NEEDED

**If using >6 PRNs in 24h, consider dosing at q4h REGULARLY (consider q6h for frail elderly) \*AND\* continue a PRN dose**

*Also consider (see guidelines\*):*

*PO solution for cough*

*eg. dextromethorphan, hydrocodone  
antinauseant eg. metoclopramide SQ  
laxative eg. PEG / sennosides*

**Patient already taking opioids**

Continue previous opioid,  
**consider increasing by 25%**

To manage breakthrough symptoms:  
**Start opioid PRN at 10% of total daily (24h) opioid dose**

Give PRN: **q1h PRN if PO, q30min if SQ**

*See guideline\* for conversion between opioids*

**For further assistance including telephone support please contact your local Palliative Care team**

## FOR ALL PATIENTS: OTHER MEDICATIONS

Opioids are the mainstay of dyspnea management, these can be helpful adjuvants

For associated anxiety:

### LORAZEPAM

0.5 - 1 mg SL q2h PRN,  
initial order: max 3 PRN / 24h,  
MD review when max reached  
*consider q6-12h regular dosing*

For severe SOB / anxiety:

### MIDAZOLAM

1 - 4 mg SQ q30min PRN,  
initial order: max 3 PRN / 24h,  
MD review when max reached  
**MAY REQUIRE MUCH MORE**  
*consider q4h regular dosing or continuous infusion if available*

For agitation / restlessness:

### METHOTRIMEPRAZINE

2.5 - 10 mg PO / SQ q2h PRN,  
initial order: max 3 PRN / 24h,  
MD review when max reached  
*consider q4h regular dosing can also be given buccally*

## Respiratory secretions / congestion near end-of-life

Advise family & bedside staff: not usually uncomfortable, just noisy, due to patient weakness / not able to clear secretions

Consider glycopyrrolate 0.4mg SQ q4h PRN \*OR\*

atropine 1% (ophthalmic drops) 1 - 2 drops SL q4h PRN

If ? fluid overload consider furosemide 20mg SQ q2h PRN & monitor response

**Engage with your team to ensure comfort is the priority as patients approach end of life. Please ensure written orders reflect this. Unmanaged symptoms at time of death will add to distress of patients, family members & bedside staff.**

These recommendations are for reference and do not supercede clinical judgement.

We have attempted to decrease complexity to allow barrier-free use in multiple settings.

Evidence supports that appropriate opioid doses do not hasten death in other conditions like COPD or advanced cancer; reassess dosing as patient's condition or level of intervention changes.

*Latest version of this document: (online updates may be slightly delayed) <http://bit.ly/LatestCOVIDSxDoc>*

**\*BC Centre for Palliative Care Guidelines**  
<http://bit.ly/BCCentreSymptomManagementGuidelines>

This document is provided "as is" to allow immediate use - it is continuing to evolve as we receive feedback. Thank you for your input and your understanding.  
Version: 2020 Mar 22. Recommendations compiled collaboratively with input from a team of BC Palliative Care MDs, pharmacists & allied health. Feedback to [katie.mcaleer@gmail.com](mailto:katie.mcaleer@gmail.com)