End of life management of respiratory secretions

This guidance provides first line management alongside alternative medications and routes of administration for patients with palliative care needs in the last days of life. For palliative management of these symptoms earlier in a person’s illness, please see MD163 Early management of secretions (in the Kirkwood toolkit).

**Upper respiratory secretions at end of life**

Respiratory secretions are a common symptom at the end of life, and may be distressing for families and carers. In the first instance, simple measures such as repositioning and an explanation of the nature of the secretions may be all that is required to help.

If the person is distressed by their secretions, the following pharmacological treatments are available:

**First line: HYOSCINE BUTYLBROMIDE**
- PRN dose: 20mg SC
- Initial syringe driver dose: 60mg/24hrs (WFI or 0.9% saline)
- Maximum dose: 120mg/24hrs.
- Available formulations: 20mg/ml (1ml amp)

**If first line unavailable: GLYCOPYRRONIUM BROMIDE**
- PRN dose: 200micrograms SC
- Initial syringe driver dose 600micrograms/24hrs
- Maximum dose: 1200micrograms/24hrs (WFI or 0.9% saline). Please check compatibility if combining with other drugs
- Available formulations: 200mcg/ml (1ml & 3ml amps)

**If second line unavailable: HYOSCINE HYDROBROMIDE**
- PRN dose: 400micrograms SC
- Initial syringe driver dose: 1200micrograms/24hrs (WFI or 0.9% saline)
- Maximum dose 1600micrograms/24hrs

**If syringe driver unavailable: HYOSCINE HYDROBROMIDE TD PATCH**
- Starting dose 1mg patch, changed every 72hrs
- Maximum dose 2 patches (2mg/72hrs)

**Avoid corticosteroids** unless absolutely necessary to treat underlying condition or to avoid steroid withdrawal

**Avoid aerosol generating procedures** and use nebulisers and high flow oxygen more carefully (as per PHE advice)

If viral infection suspected

---

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN CREATED BY KIRKWOOD HOSPICE. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION OR RESALE WITHOUT PRIOR PERMISSION

MD165 End of life management of secretions (toolkit)  
Version 2 Created 03/20 AV/SO