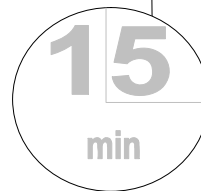


CLIP

15 minute Worksheet



Helping the patient with pain

10: Managing severe pain

Advanced level

Produced by
**Coleman Education
Centre**
St. Oswald's Hospice
Regent Avenue
Gosforth
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
NE3 1EE

Tel: 0191 285 0063
Fax: 0191 284 8004

This version written and edited
by:
Claud Regnard
Consultant in Palliative Medicine
St. Oswald's Hospice, Newcastle
City Hospitals NHS Trust and
Northgate&Prudhoe NHS Trust

Aim of this worksheet

To understand the principles in managing severe pain.

How to use this worksheet

- You can work through this worksheet by yourself, or with a tutor.
- Read the case study below, then work on the questions overleaf.
- The work page is on the right side, the information page is on the left.
- Work any way you want: you can try answering from your own knowledge (in which case fold over the information page), you can use the information page (this is not cheating- you learn as you find the information), or you can use other sources of information
- It should take you about 15 minutes. If anything is unclear, discuss it with a colleague.
- If you think any information is wrong or out of date let us know
- Use the activity on the back page and take this learning into your workplace

Case study

Pat is a 36 year old woman, married with two sons aged 12 and 9. Investigations revealed a carcinoma of the sigmoid colon with liver metastases. She copes with some denial and refuses to tell her sons. She has a persistent, burning perineal pain which has not responded to increased opioid doses and is getting steadily worse.

One evening you are asked to see her urgently and find her very distressed. She is on the bed, on her knees rocking to and fro, saying the pain is 'all over'.

v4: 2008

What can cause severe pain?

There are many reasons why pain may become suddenly severe:

- *A change in the analgesia:* this may be due to a recent change in opioid (opioid conversion ratios are only approximations), not taking an analgesic (eg. because of vomiting or adverse effects), or a change in the uptake or elimination of an analgesic (eg. loss of adhesion of a fentanyl patch).
- *Inflammation:* due to infection (eg. pleurisy due to a chest infection), irritation (eg. pleurisy due to a pulmonary embolus or peritonitis due to a bowel perforation), or chemical damage (eg. drug-induced gastrointestinal mucosal damage or a perianal skin burn caused by dantron).
- *Ischaemia:* due to peripheral vascular disease, or myocardial ischaemia.
- *Tissue distension:* eg. a bleed into a liver metastasis causing liver capsule pain.
- *Muscle spasm:* eg. colic or skeletal muscular spasms.
- *Tissue rupture:* eg. bone fractures due to metastatic disease, or fistula formation.
- *Reduced ability to cope:* due to fear, depression or past experiences.

In Pat, there is nothing to suggest a new pain. Her comment that the pain is 'all over' is typical of so-called 'overwhelming pain'. This is when pain is accompanied by marked fear and the whole experience becomes too intense to make sense of it all. Her persisting pain may have steadily reduced her ability to cope until no coping skills were left and the situation became overwhelming.

A plan of action

Immediately: to achieve sufficient comfort to allow an initial assessment you need to:

- find a comfortable position for Pat
- give Pat her usual 'as required' dose of analgesic. This may be best by injection for speed of onset.
- try and reduce her fear with reassurance, company and distraction. In overwhelming pain this is usually insufficient and the level of fear needs medication such as lorazepam 0.5mg sublingually or midazolam 2.5mg SC or buccally (between cheek and teeth- without a needle!). She needs to get enough to relax her, but not so much that she falls asleep and cannot tell you about her pain.

Within 1 hour: exclude causes that need urgent management or can be treated simply

Examples that need urgent management are myocardial infarction, pulmonary embolus, bone fracture, spinal cord compression and peritonitis.

An example of a severe pain that can be treated simply is colic.

Within 4 hours: achieve comfort at rest by:

- increasing the regular analgesia by 50%
- checking whether this is a new pain (see CliP worksheet on *Diagnosing the Pain*).
- contacting a palliative care or pain specialist to advise on planning the next step. This is essential if the pain is unchanged at this stage.

Within 24 hours: plan for stable pain control by:

- ensuring a good nights sleep for Pat
- reviewing the support and treatment she will need to cope with any anxiety or low mood. Persistence of psychological problems will delay the resolution of the pain for several weeks and to avoid disappointment this needs to be understood by patient, partner and staff. See the CliP worksheets on *Helping the Anxious Person* and *Helping the Withdrawn Patient*.

An analgesic staircase for the drugs used in severe pain

This should include many of the approaches you have already written down in the plan of action above:

Step 1: give usual 'as required dose. Give a benzodiazepine if fear is prominent. Lorazepam 0.5mg orally can be helpful, but if the situation is urgent buccal midazolam 2.5-5mg works within 10minutes.

Step 2: give any simple treatments (eg. hyoscine butylbromide for colic), otherwise increase regular analgesia by 50%.

Step 3: Refer to pain or palliative care specialist to

- review pain
- consider the use of ketamine

Step 4: consider spinal analgesia or a nerve block. If the pain remains severe, sedation may be needed until the procedure can be organised.

A postscript on ketamine

Ketamine is a 40 yr old anaesthetic drug which in the last 10 years has been noted to be an unusual analgesic. It is particularly useful for persistent movement-related pains and some neuropathic pains. It can be given orally, buccally and by subcutaneous infusion. It is usually well tolerated at low doses but at higher doses (>400mg/24hrs) can cause drowsiness, euphoria or dysphoria, hallucinations and hypertension.

Reflect

Think about

- why Pat's is saying her pain is 'all over'.
- what could have caused her pain to go out of control

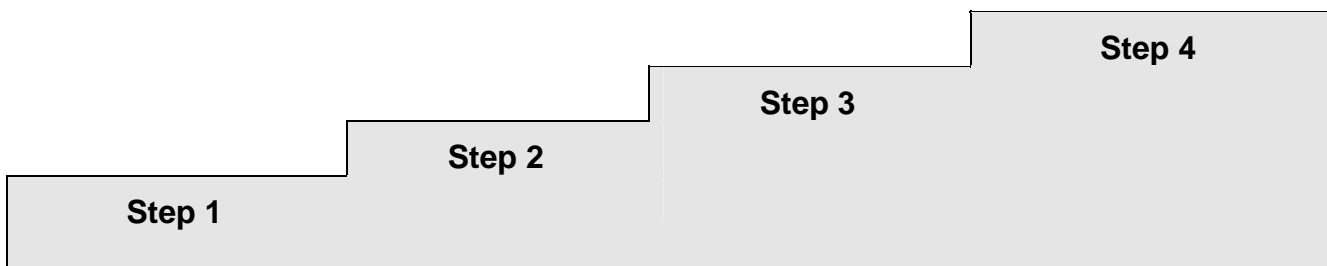
Write

Write a plan of action for helping Pat

- Immediately *Goal: to achieve sufficient comfort to allow an initial assessment*
Your action:
- Within 1 hour *Goal: to exclude causes requiring urgent management*
Your action:
- Within 4 hours *Goal: to achieve comfort at rest*
Your action:
- Within 24 hours *Goal: to plan for stable pain control*
Your action:

Write

Write an analgesic staircase for the drugs you might have to use for Pat's severe pain



FURTHER ACTIVITY: Managing severe pain

Think back to a patient with severe pain:

-how frightened was the patient?

-how quickly was the pain brought under control?

FURTHER READING: Managing severe pain

Journal articles

Attal N. Chronic neuropathic pain: mechanisms and treatment. *Clinical Journal of Pain*. 2000; **16**(3 Suppl):S118-30.

Dellemijn P. Are opioids effective in relieving neuropathic pain? *Pain*. 1999; **80**(3): 453-62.

Enarson MC. Hays H. Woodroffe MA. Clinical experience with oral ketamine. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*. 1999; **17**(5): 384-6.

Fitzgibbon EJ. Viola R. Parenteral ketamine as an analgesic adjuvant for severe pain: development and retrospective audit of a protocol for a palliative care unit. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*. 2005; **8**(1): 49-57.

Hanks GW. Conno F. Cherny N. Hanna M. Kalso E. McQuay HJ. Mercadante S. Meynadier J. Poulain P. Ripamonti C. Radbruch L. Casas JR. Sawe J. Twycross RG. Ventafridda V. Expert Working Group of the Research Network of the European Association for Palliative Care. Morphine and alternative opioids in cancer pain: the EAPC recommendations. *British Journal of Cancer*. 2001; **84**(5): 587-93.

Hanks GW. Forbes K. Opioid responsiveness. *Acta Anaesthesiologica Scandinavica*. 1997; **41**: 154-8.

Moryl N. Kogan M. Comfort C. Obbens E. Methadone in the treatment of pain and terminal delirium in advanced cancer patients. *Palliative & Supportive Care*. 2005; **3**(4): 311-7.

Rabben T. Skjelbred P. Oye I. Prolonged analgesic effect of ketamine, an N-methyl-D-aspartate receptor inhibitor, in patients with chronic pain. *Journal of Pharmacology & Experimental Therapeutics*. 1999; **289**(2):1060-6.

Rice ASC, Maton S, Postherpetic Neuralgia Study Group. Gabapentin in postherpetic neuralgia: a randomised, double blind, placebo controlled trial. *Pain*, 2001; **94**: 215-224.

Watson CP. The treatment of neuropathic pain: antidepressants and opioids. *Clinical Journal of Pain*. 2000; **16**(2 Suppl): S49-55.

Resource books and websites

A Guide to Symptom Relief in Palliative Care, 5th ed. Regnard C, Hockley J. Abingdon: Radcliffe Medical Press, 2004

Cancer Pain Relief and Palliative Care. Geneva : WHO, 1990.

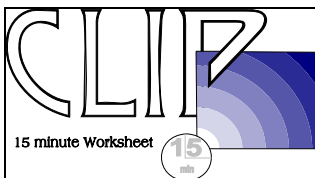
Oral Morphine, Information for Patients, Families and Friends. Twycross R., Lack S.A. Beaconsfield Publishers. 1988.

Oxford Textbook of Palliative Medicine 3rd ed. Doyle D, Hanks G, Cherny NI, Calman K eds. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003.

PCF3- Palliative Care Formulary, 3rd ed. Twycross RG, Wilcock A. Oxford: Radcliffe Medical Press, 2008. Also on www.palliativedrugs.com

Symptom Management in Advanced Cancer, 3rd edition. 2001. Twycross RG, Wilcock A. Abingdon: Radcliffe Medical Press.

Wall and Melzack's textbook of pain, 5th ed. Stephen B. McMahon and Martin Koltzenburg, eds. Edinburgh : Elsevier Churchill Livingstone, 2006.



**Current
Learning
In
Palliative care**
An accessible
learning programme
for health care
professionals

15 minute worksheets are available on:

- An introduction to palliative care
- Helping the patient with pain
- Helping the patient with symptoms other than pain
- Moving the ill patient
- Psychological needs
- Helping patients with reduced hydration and nutrition
- Procedures in palliative care
- Understanding and helping the person with learning disabilities
- The last hours and days
- Bereavement

Also available online on
www.helpthehospices.org.uk (click on 'e-learning')