

Prescribing for Syringe Pumps: top tips for getting it right.

Dr Sarah Human, Consultant in Palliative Medicine, Rowcroft Hospice.





McKinley T34 Syringe Pump

REF: 300-0415 REV: 4 LOT: 15408-10



1. Press and Hold **INFO** key until START UP screens appear
 2. Wait until Pre-Loading has finished (actuator stops moving)
 3. Load Syringe-position correctly so all sensors stop flashing
 4. Confirm **+** syringe size & brand
 5. Press **NO** for New Syringe or **+** to Resume current program
- NOTE**-Steps 6-8 are skipped if a pre-set duration is locked in. Whilst delivering **INFO** shows infusion data & battery life.
6. Confirm **+** volume to be infused or Change (**+**/**-**)
 7. Confirm **+** infusion duration or Change (**+**/**-**)
 8. Confirm **+** calculated rate or Change (**+**/**-**)
 9. **ALWAYS** check data on the summary screen matches prescription before pressing **INFO** key to confirm acceptance
 10. Press **+** key to start infusion

Ref: 300-0425M Rev:3 Lot:8682-3

REF: 300-0415 REV: 4 LOT: 15408-10

REF: 300-0425M Rev:3 Lot:8682-3

INFO **+** **-** **YES START** **NO STOP** **FF** **BACK** **ON/OFF**

Prescribing for Syringe Pumps

- **When** to prescribe
- **What** to prescribe
- **How** to prescribe
- A case study
- Useful resources
- Questions



A syringe pump is
for.....
not just for dying

Indications for Syringe Pumps

1. Altered level of consciousness in a dying patient
2. Persistent nausea and vomiting e.g., in bowel obstruction
3. Impaired swallow
4. Poor compliance with oral medication
5. Poor absorption of oral drugs (rare)
6. Patient preference

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The syringe pump is simply another method of administration of medication for patients who are symptomatic



The weighing up.....

Advantages

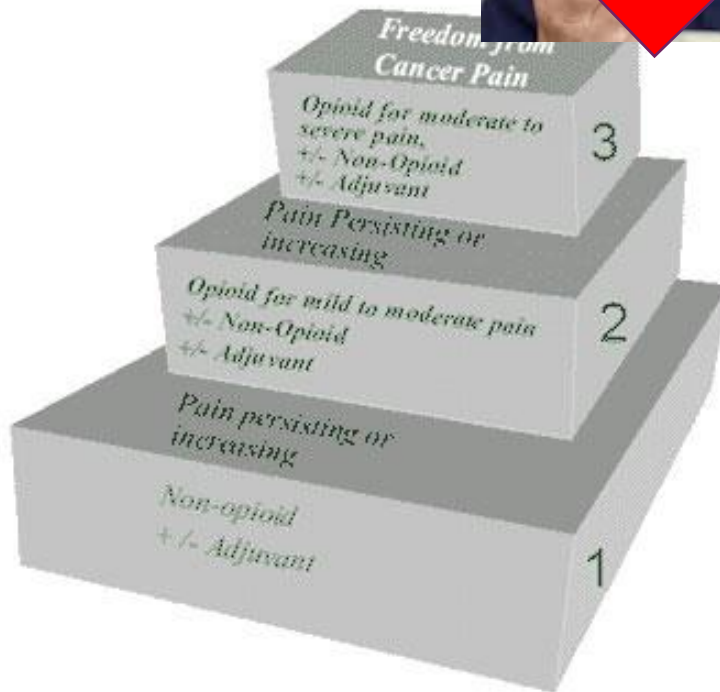
- Round the clock delivery of medication
- Reduces need for repeated injections
- Once daily change of pump
- Control of multiple symptoms
- More independence – can be worn in a holster
- Patients/families can find daily visit reassuring

Disadvantages

- Initial cost and training
- Inflammation/pain at infusion site
- Compatibility of drugs problems
- Once daily change of pump
- Patients/families can find daily visit intrusive

Analgesic Prescribing

WHO's Pain Relief Ladder





Syringe pump medications

For the continuous subcutaneous infusion (pump) **only** prescribe drugs that are clinically indicated at the time

Analgesic
Antiemetic(s)
Antispasmodic
Antisecretory
Anxiolytic (sedative)
Plus diluent

All of these should be prescribed on the **PRN section** of the prescription chart in anticipation of use

PRESCRIBER MUST COMPLETE PARTS 1 & 2 OF THIS FORM

DURING COVID PANDEMIC 2020 TRANSFER OF THIS PMAR IS TO TAKE PLACE ELECTRONICALLY
FROM GENERAL PRACTICE TO THE LOCALITY COMMUNITY NURSING TEAM

Patient Name		Date of Birth		GP	
NHS /Unique Identification number		Allergies			

Part 1: COMMUNITY PRESCRIPTION FOR CONTINUOUS SUBCUTANEOUS SYRINGE PUMP INFUSIONS
For prescribing guidance see overleaf

DATE/TIME	Generic NAME of DRUG and DILUENT Blank rows are provided for prescribing of drugs not listed	24 HOUR DOSE mg/24hrs Consider prescribing dose ranges	PRESCRIBER NAME & SIGNATURE (IN FULL)
	MORPHINE sulfate- max of 30mg/ml due to solubility		
	Metoclopramide Hydrochloride		
	Levomepromazine		
	Midazolam		
	Hyoscine BUTYLbromide		
	Hyoscine HYDRObromide		
	Haloperidol		
	Water for injection		

Part 2: PRESCRIPTION FOR AS REQUIRED (PRN) DOSES

DATE/TIME	GENERIC NAME OF MEDICATION & ANY DILUENT	DOSE Consider prescribing dose ranges	FREQUENCY	ROUTE	PRESCRIBER NAME & SIGNATURE IN FULL
	MORPHINE sulfate				
	Metoclopramide Hydrochloride				
	Levomepromazine				
	Midazolam				
	Hyoscine BUTYLbromide				
	Hyoscine HYDRObromide				
	Haloperidol				

For prescribing guidance see overleaf

Anticipatory syringe pumps? To do or not to do...

RISKS

A lack of individualisation

No anticipation of dose/drug changes between prescribing and initiation

Administration errors

BENEFITS

Patient circumstances are foreseeable and unambiguous even for those without specialist experience

Medication choices and doses are unlikely to change

Initiation of the syringe pump is overseen and followed by a timely review by a skilled clinician

Ben Bowers et al

BMJ Supportive and Palliative Care 2021; **0** ; 1-2



Anticholinergic Toxidrome

"HOT as a Desert"
hyperthermia



"Mad as a Hatter"
confused



dilated pupils
(mydriasis)



"Dry as a Bone"
dry mouth
urinary retention



"Red as a Beet"
flushed skin

shaking

grabbing
invisible
objects



tachycardia
absent bowel
sounds



So Hot!





Antisecretory Medications

Pooling of fluid in hypopharynx

Affects about 50% patients

Non-drug measures important

- Reassure family
- Positioning of patient

Occasionally suction

Anticholinergic drugs

- Successful in approx 50%
- Give early
- **Hyoscine hydrobromide (sedating)**
- Hyoscine butylbromide (buscopan)
or glycopyrronium (both non-sedating)

Antispasmodic Medications

Anticholinergic drugs

- Hyoscine butylbromide (buscopan), **hyoscine hydrobromide**, glycopyrronium
- Smooth muscle spasm
 - Intestinal colic
 - Bladder spasm
- **Sedating** vs non-sedating
- Dosing
 - Buscopan 20mg stat, 60-120mg/24hrs in pump
 - Hyoscine hydrobromide 0.4mg stat, 1.2 - 2.4mg/24hrs max in pump

What about opioid transdermal patches?



What about prescribing in renal failure?



<https://rowcrofthospice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Prescribing-at-the-End-of-Life-for-Patients-with-Renal-Impairment-G1612-04.09.2020.pdf>

And some other scenarios.....

- Managing people with Diabetes

https://rowcrofthospice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/RH-diabetic-guidelines-jul2013_2-1.pdf

- Managing people with Parkinson's

<https://rowcrofthospice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/End-of-Life-Care-in-Parkinsons-Disease.pdf>

- Managing seizures

<https://rowcrofthospice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Guidance-for-administration-of-Levetiracetam-via-continuous-subcutaneous-infusion-in-the-community-setting.pdf>

- What about steroids?

For interest

Other drugs that can be used in syringe pumps

- Diclofenac
- Octreotide
- Esomeprazole
- Furosemide
- Levetiracetam
- Ketamine

Troubleshooting

- Infusion site problems – may need to add a small dose of dexamethasone (0.1mls of 3.8mg/ml or 3.3mg/ml) to the continuous subcutaneous infusion
- Drug compatibility – mixing drugs
- Dose conversions when changing route of medication

THE SYRINGE DRIVER

Continuous subcutaneous infusions in palliative care

4TH EDITION



ANDREW DICKMAN AND JENNIFER SCHNEIDER

120 **Table X: Compatibility Chart for Two Drugs in Water for Injections**

	Cyclizine	Glycopyrronium	Haloperidol	Hyoscine HBr	Hyoscine BBr	Levomopromazine	Metoclopramide	Midazolam
Glycopyrronium	?							
Haloperidol								
Hyoscine hydrobromide								
Hyoscine butylbromide								
Levomopromazine								
Metoclopramide								
Midazolam								
Morphine/Diamorphine								
Oxycodone								

How to prescribe Syringe Pumps

- Use available guidance for prescribing – or phone a friend!
- Send prescription to pharmacy and arrange collection
- Ensure PMAR sent (some areas can be electronic to DN team)
- Liaise DN team and co-ordination of set-up
- Ensure patient and family aware of prescribing and rational, talk about what to expect
- Check TEP/Palliative Care Register up to date
- Ensure clinical follow up planned

Communication

- Patient (if possible)
- Family/carers
- Healthcare professionals – robust communication between daytime and out of hours services
- Ensure plans in place for regular reviews
- clarity of roles and responsibilities
- Clarify who the patient/family should call if there are any problems
- Ensure these plans are clearly documented and that you have given this information



PRESCRIBING IN PALLIATIVE CARE: A GUIDE TO EQUIVALENT DOSES FOR OPIOID DRUGS

This is to be used as **a guide** rather than a set of definitive equivalences. It is crucial to appreciate that conversion ratios are never more than an approximate guide (comprehensive data are lacking, inter-individual variation). The advice is always to calculate doses using morphine as standard and to adjust them to suit the patient and the situation. Some of these doses have by necessity been rounded up or down to fit in with the preparations available, including adjustment of doses for liquid and injectable medications in order to optimise ability to dispense accurately.

PLEASE SEEK SPECIALIST ADVICE IF YOU ARE UNCERTAIN ABOUT WHAT TO PRESCRIBE AND/OR PATIENT NEEDING ESCALATING OPIOID DOSES



Oral Morphine			Subcutaneous Morphine		Subcutaneous Diamorphine		Oral Oxycodone			Subcutaneous Oxycodone		Approximate TD Fentanyl patch micrograms/hr	Subcutaneous Alfentanil		Subcutaneous Fentanyl	
4 hr dose (mg)	12hr SR dose (mg)	24hr Total dose (mg)	4 hr dose (mg)	24 hr total dose (mg)	4 hr dose (mg)	24 hr total dose (mg)	4hr dose (mg)	12hr SR dose (mg)	24hr total dose (mg)	4 hr dose (mg)	24 hr total dose (mg)	Please see additional chart below for dose conversion ranges	4 hr dose (mg)	24hr total dose (mg)	4 hr dose (mcg)	24hr total dose (mcg)
5	15	30	2.5	15	1	10	2.5	7.5	15	1	7.5	12mcg	0.1	1	25	200-250
10	30	60	5	30	2.5-5	20	5	15	30	2.5	15	25mcg	0.2	2	50	400-500
15	45	90	7.5	45	5	30	7.5	25	50	4	25	25-37mcg	0.5	3	100	600-750
20	60	120	10	60	7.5	40	10	30	60	5	30	37-50mcg	0.7	4		
30	90	180	15	90	10	60	15	45	90	7.5	45	50-75mcg	1	6		
40	120	240	20	120	12.5	80	20	60	120	10	60	75-100mcg	1	8		
50	150	300	25	150	15	100	25	75	150	12.5	75	100-150mcg	1.5	10		
60	180	360	30	180	20	120	30	90	180	15	90	100-150mcg	2	12		
70	210	420	35	210	25	140	35	105	210	17.5	100	125-175mcg	2.5	14		
80	240	480	40	240	27.5	160	40	120	240	20	120	125-200mcg	2.5	16		

Syringe pump volume issues likely above 500mcg/24hours because fentanyl injection available as 50micrograms/ml

- Two thirds of palliative care patients need <180mg/24hrs of oral morphine
- The dose conversion ratio of morphine to oxycodone is approximately 1.5-2:1. For the purposes of this guidance we have adopted a 2:1 ratio
- The dose conversion ratio of SC diamorphine: SC alfentanil is from 6-10:1. It is prudent to use the more conservative ratio when switching from one to the other e.g. if switching from diamorphine to alfentanil, use dose conversion ratio 10:1 so that 10mg diamorphine = 1mg alfentanil. If switching from alfentanil to diamorphine use dose conversion ratio 6:1 so that 1mg alfentanil = 6mg diamorphine.
- The dose conversion ratio of SC Alfentanil: SC fentanyl is approximately 4-5:1

TRANSDERMAL (TD) OPIOID PATCHES

Fentanyl TD patch micrograms/hr	Approximate oral Morphine mg/24hours
12	30-45
25	60-90
37	90-135
50	120-180
62	150-225
75	180-270
100	240-360
125	300-450
150	360-540
175	420-630
200	480-720

Buprenorphine TD micrograms/hr	Approximate oral Morphine mg/24hrs
5	10-20
10	20-30
15	30-40
20	40-50
35.5	80-90
52.5	120-130
70	160-180
Maximum authorised dose is two 70micrograms/hr patches	

- A PO morphine:transdermal fentanyl dose conversion ratio of 100-150:1 is used (PCF6 & BNF 100:1, Public Health Education Opioids Aware Resource 150:1) resulting in a dose range of oral morphine per patch strength e.g. Fentanyl TD 25mcg/hr patch approximately= 60-90mg oral morphine/24hrs
- It is suggested that for conversions from oral morphine to fentanyl patches, the lower doses of fentanyl should be used for patients who have been on oral opioids for just weeks and the higher doses for people who have been on a stable and well tolerated oral opioid regimen for a longer period.
- Transdermal fentanyl patches are changed every 3 days (72 hours)
- A PO morphine: transdermal buprenorphine dose conversion of 100:1 is used (PCF6)
- A variety of transdermal buprenorphine patches are available, changed either every 3, 4 days or 7 days. Check carefully before prescribing & instructing the patient.

Resources: Palliative Care Formulary 6th Edition (PCF6)

BNF

UK Medicines Information: How should conversion from oral morphine to fentanyl patches be carried out?

https://www.sps.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/UKMI_QA_Conversion-from-oral-morphine-to-fentanyl-patches_November-2017_Final.docx

Updated November 2018 / Review November 2021

Dr Sarah Human, Dr Jo Sykes and Dr George Walker, Consultants in Palliative Medicine, Rowcroft Hospice, South Devon in collaboration with Hospiscare, Exeter, St Luke's Hospice, Plymouth and North Devon Hospice, Barnstaple.

Indications for using a subcutaneous syringe pump [SCSP]:

1. Altered level of consciousness in a dying patient
2. Persistent nausea and vomiting e.g. in bowel obstruction
3. Inability to swallow
4. Poor compliance with oral medication

The syringe pump is simply another method of administration of medication for patients who are symptomatic.

ANALGESICS

Morphine – dose per 24 hours: no ceiling dose but:

1. Start at 10-15mg/24 hours in opioid naive patients (less in very elderly/frail)
2. See conversion table for calculating doses, changing from oral to SCSP use and using other opioids. See conversion table for calculating doses, changing from oral to SCSP use and using other opioids e.g. converting the total daily dose of oral morphine to the total daily dose of subcutaneous morphine by dividing by 2, e.g. MST 60mg bd=120mg/day =morphine 60mg/24 hours by SCSP.

3. **Caution:** in patients with **significant renal impairment (suspected eGFR <30)** aim to avoid morphine because of significant risk of opioid accumulation/toxicity. Alternative opioids such as oxycodone/fentanyl/alfentanil may be more appropriate. Please seek advice from Specialist Palliative Care team (see guidance on prescribing at end of life in renal failure)

4. **Patches** - Transdermal opioid patches should not be started in the terminal stage since it takes too long to titrate against a patient's pain. If the patient is already established on a patch it may be appropriate to continue with it and add in additional medications via the SCSP.

ANTIEMETICS

1. **Metoclopramide** useful for gastric stasis and upper gastrointestinal obstruction. Avoid in patients with colic. Non-sedating.

Dose per 24 hours: 30-60mg (BNF dose range is 30-100mg/24h)

Dose per prn injection: 10mg 6-8 hourly

2. **Haloperidol** useful in chemically induced vomiting (e.g. hypercalcaemia, renal failure), and/or in patients with psychotic features. Sedating at higher doses. Use lower dose in the elderly.

Dose per 24 hours: 2.5-5mg (up to 10mg if being used for sedation as well)

Dose per prn injection: 1-3mg od-bd

3. **Levomopromazine** good antiemetic especially with co-existing anxiety, very sedating at higher doses.

Dose per 24 hours: 6.25-25mg (BNF dose range 5-25mg/24h)

Dose per prn injection: 6.25mg 6-8 hourly

4. **Cyclizine** relatively non-sedating, useful in mechanical bowel obstruction or raised intracranial pressure, but precipitates out when mixed with Hyoscine Butylbromide.

Dose per 24 hours: 50-150mg **Dose per prn injection:** 50mg 8 hourly (max. 150mg/24hours)

ANTISPASMODICS

Hyoscine butylbromide (Buscopan)

Dose per 24 hrs: 60-120mg (BNF dose range 60-300mg/24h)

Dose per PRN injection 20mg 4 hourly

SEDATIVES

1. **Midazolam** useful for anxiety, breathlessness, restlessness and muscle stiffness in terminal phase. Also used as an anticonvulsant.

Dose per 24 hours: 10-60mg. Higher doses occasionally required. (BNF start 10-20mg/24h usual dose 20-60mg/24h)

Dose per prn injection: 2.5-10mg 4 hourly

Caution: respiratory depression is more likely when midazolam is given parenterally with morphine.

2. **Levomopromazine** useful as sedative but can lower fitting threshold

Dose per 24 hours: 12.5-50mg (higher doses occasionally required)

Dose per prn injection: 12.5-25mg 4 hourly

TERMINAL SECRETIONS

1. **Hyoscine butylbromide (Buscopan)** useful in respiratory secretions **when sedation not desired**

Dose per 24 hours: 60-120mg (BNF dose range 20-120mg/24h)

Dose per prn injection: 20mg 4 hourly

Suitable for use if suspected eGFR <30

2. **Hyoscine hydrobromide** useful in terminal stages **when sedation required** but can cause paradoxical agitation; usually given with a sedative, e.g.

Levomopromazine or Midazolam. **Caution: avoid if suspected eGFR <30.**

Dose per 24 hours: 1.2-2.4mg (BNF dose range 1.2-2mg/24h)

Dose per prn injection: 0.4-0.6mg 4 hourly (max. 2.4mg/24 hours)

AS REQUIRED (PRN) DOSES MUST BE PRESCRIBED

- Always ensure that adequate prn doses are clearly written on the syringe pump prescription sheet so that any trained healthcare professional visiting the home who does not know the patient can give extra medication when indicated. These prn medications are not the same as Just In Case Bag (JICB) medication.
- JICB medication should be prescribed when a clinical deterioration is anticipated but the patient does not yet need a syringe pump for current symptom control.
- A syringe pump should be started when clinically indicated and should not be delayed because JICB medications are already available. There is no requirement to use JICB medication prior to setting up a syringe pump.
- Ideally there should be no more than a 4 hour delay between the request for starting a syringe pump and it being set up for the patient.

24 hour advice line (Rowcroft Hospice) tel no: **01803 210800**. Calls go through to the hospice. The senior nurse will be able to answer queries or ask the doctor on call to ring you back.

Rowcroft Community Specialist Palliative Care Team - Mon – Fri 9-5 tel no: 01803 210811 Sat – Sun, bank holidays 9-1 (tel advice) tel no: 01803 210812

Consultants in Palliative Medicine, Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust/Rowcroft Hospice
GP Facilitators in Palliative Care, South Devon and Torbay.
Updated November 2018 Review November 2021

Case study

Fred is 72 and has lung cancer

He is thought to be in the last few days/week or two of life

He cannot manage his tablets orally

He has had pain and nausea but these symptoms have been well controlled by:

MST 60mg bd, oramorph 20mg used once in the last 24 hours

Metoclopramide 10mg tds

What could you prescribe for his syringe pump?



Case study



The next day Fred becomes unsettled, agitated and chesty.

You have ruled out urinary retention but feel he is in pain.

How might you amend his medication regime?

How might you amend his medication regimen if nausea and vomiting became an issue, rather than respiratory secretions?

Some Resources

1. S+W Devon Formulary – Chapter 16 Palliative Care

<https://southwest.devonformularyguidance.nhs.uk/formulary/chapters/16.-palliative-care>

2. N+E Devon Formulary – Chapter 16 Palliative Care

<https://northeast.devonformularyguidance.nhs.uk/formulary/chapters/16-palliative-care>

3. Rowcroft Hospice website – follow tabs How Can We Help, then Referrals, then Clinical Resources

<https://www.rowcrofthospice.org.uk/how-we-can-help/referrals-access-services/clinical-resources/>

4. St Luke's Hospice website – follow tabs Information Hub, then Healthcare Professionals

<https://www.stlukes-hospice.org.uk/healthcare-professionals/>

All above include links to the Devon Opioid Conversion Chart

Some Resources

5. NDDH Symptom Management in Palliative Care Guidelines:

<https://www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk/2019/11/symptom-management-in-palliative-care-guidelines/>

6. Cornwall Hospice Care – you can visit the website then follow tabs Our Care, then Healthcare Professionals, then Professional Advice, then APG chart (takes you to this pdf document)

<https://www.cornwallhospicecare.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/APG-V7-FINAL-1.pdf>

7. Palliative Care Adult Network Guidelines Plus; Dr Ian Back, Dr Max Watson, Dr Nigel Sykes, Dr Craig Gannon and Peter Armstrong

<https://book.pallcare.info/>

This online resource (and available as an App) includes an opioid dose converter and information about syringe pump medication compatibility



