

Patient information

Anticipatory Medicines Information for Patients and Carers

Specialist Palliative Care Team

What are anticipatory medicines?

Anticipatory medicines (sometimes called 'just in case' medicines) are a small supply of injectable medicines prescribed individually for patients. At home, these medicines will be kept safely 'just in case' they are needed to manage existing, or new symptoms. Having a supply of anticipatory medicines readily available can be reassuring to a patient as it means a qualified healthcare professional will be able to access these medicines quickly and easily if they are needed, especially at weekends or night-time.

If a patient approaching the end of their life develops symptoms (such as pain, nausea, agitation, or noisy breathing), they will be assessed to establish the cause. There are a variety of ways in which symptoms can be managed, and if medicines are required these are given as tablets or oral liquids where possible. In some cases, it can be difficult for people to swallow medications. If this happens, anticipatory medicines given in an injectable form, can be prescribed.

Who administers anticipatory medicines?

In many cases anticipatory medicines don't need to be used. If they are needed, anticipatory medicines can only be given by a qualified healthcare professional, who will explain to the patient:

- why they are being used.
- what they are being used for.
- how they will be given.
- and obtain consent for their use

How are anticipatory medicines administered?

Anticipatory medicines are given by injection just under the skin (the subcutaneous route). Sometimes, especially if several injections are needed daily to manage symptoms, the healthcare professional responsible for the care of the patient may recommend that symptom control medicines are administered via a small, battery-powered pump that delivers medicines at a constant rate throughout the day and night. The medical term for this is a 'continuous subcutaneous infusion (CSCI)', although it is often referred to as a 'syringe pump'. Medicines administered via a syringe pump are reviewed daily by a qualified healthcare professional.

What type of medicines are used as anticipatory medicines?

Anticipatory medicines are prescribed specifically for each individual patient, which means they will have been carefully chosen to treat the different symptoms a patient might experience. They are typically prescribed to control the following symptoms (although these may not be experienced by every patient).

- **Pain:** in palliative and end of life care, opioid medicines such as morphine or oxycodone, are often used to manage symptoms of pain.
- **Breathlessness:** an opioid medicine (such as morphine) or a benzodiazepine (such as midazolam) may be used to manage breathlessness.
- **Nausea (sickness):** there are several anti-sickness medicines available. The prescriber will choose the best one to treat the likely cause of the sickness.
- **Anxiety or agitation:** there are several medicines available to treat agitation and anxiety (such as midazolam or levomepromazine) which help to make the patient calmer and more relaxed.
- **Noisy respiratory (chest) secretions:** when a patient approaches the end of life, they may become too weak to cough and clear secretions from their airways. This can result in noisy breathing. A medicine that reduces secretions (such as glycopyrronium) can be used to help prevent noisy breathing.

Can anticipatory medicines cause side effects?

Any medicine has the potential to cause side effects, but in all cases the lowest effective dose will be prescribed, and the patient will be monitored closely for any unwanted side effects. Some common side effects that may be seen include constipation, sickness, drowsiness, or a dry mouth.

What if a patient's symptoms don't improve with their anticipatory medicines?

Anticipatory medicines will be administered as needed by a qualified healthcare professional. They will review symptoms regularly and be able to arrange a dose adjustment or a change of medicine, if necessary, to ensure symptoms are fully controlled.

Where should anticipatory medicines be stored?

Anticipatory medicines are prescribed specifically for a named patient and should never be given or taken by anyone else. They do not need to be kept in a fridge, but they should be kept in a cool, dry place. If the patient is at home, as with all medicines, anticipatory medicines should be kept in a safe place, out of reach of children or vulnerable adults.

Who can a patient or carer speak to about anticipatory medicines?

If you have any concerns about anticipatory medicines, contact the health professional involved in the patient's care. This might be a member of hospital staff, a GP, a Community Nurse, or someone from the Specialist Palliative Care team.

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Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

Further information is available at:

- **NHS website for information on end-of-life care, and managing pain and other symptoms End of life care - NHS (www.nhs.uk)**
- **National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Quality Standard on anticipatory prescribing Quality statement 3: Anticipatory prescribing | Care of dying adults in the last days of life | Quality standards | NICE**

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