

PALLIATIVE CARE TIPS – Sharon Watanabe, MD. Tertiary Palliative Care Unit, Grey Nuns Community Hospital – Issue #11 (Collect them all) (Updated January 2006)

PALLIATIVE CARE TIPS ON HYDRATION

- Rationale:** The role of hydration in palliative care patients is controversial and has not yet been established by prospective studies. Arguments for and against hydration revolve around potential positive and negative effects on symptoms, quality of life and survival. Ultimately, the decision to hydrate or not hydrate needs to be individualized, taking into consideration the possible benefits and risks in the context of the patient's symptoms, overall condition and goals of care.
- Method:** Hydration by the subcutaneous route (hypodermoclysis) is preferred over the intravenous route in the palliative care setting because of greater ease of site access, possibility of connecting/disconnecting to facilitate patient mobility, and feasibility for home administration.
- Fluid:** An electrolyte-containing fluid should be used, as non-electrolyte solutions can draw fluid into the interstitial space:
Rehydration → NS
Maintenance → 2/3 – 1/3
KCl and MgSO₄ may be added (watch for site irritation)
- Rate:** Continuous → up to 100 cc/hr, by gravity
Bolus → 500 cc over 1 hr up to 3 times/day, by infusion pump
- Hyaluronidase:** Hyaluronidase was previously used to improve absorption. However, it is no longer available, and recent experience suggests that absorption is usually adequate without it.
- Volume:** Palliative care patients generally require less fluid than the average population:
Rehydration → 2 – 2.5 L/day
Maintenance → 1 – 1.5 L/day (0.5 L/day if anuric)
- Monitoring:** Reassess clinically.
Bloodwork may be helpful (electrolytes, urea, creatinine).
Note that edema and third-space accumulations may be manifestations of disease processes (hypoalbuminemia, etc.) and may not correlate with intravascular volume status.

REMEMBER: For referrals, questions, or telephone consultations call 496-1300 weekdays and weekends.

Palliative Care Tips are now available on our Website: www.palliative.org