

ACNP ABSTRACT

Title:

Home-based carers, given appropriate support, can confidently manage breakthrough symptoms using subcutaneous medicines

Presentation type:

Oral

Theme:

Clinical practice

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Text: (guidelines 300; currently 299)

Most Australians say they want to die at home, though (less than 14% achieve that outcome) more than 50% die in hospital.(1)

Palliative patients are inherently unstable; symptoms can rapidly escalate and, if not optimally treated, can necessitate transfer to inpatient settings. Symptom management at end of life often requires administration of subcutaneous medicine for breakthrough symptoms.

Research confirms that with standardised education and resources from health professionals, carers can be taught the necessary skills to help manage breakthrough symptoms at home.(2)

Carers often express a lack of confidence initially when asked if they would give subcutaneous medicines but confidence increases with time.(3) Despite this, they remain motivated to help as they believe their ability to manage breakthrough symptoms using subcutaneous medicines helps to keep the person they are caring for at home.

A randomised controlled trial (RCT) examined conducted to explore possible differences in trained carers' confidence in administering subcutaneous medicines.(4) Carers were allocated to one of three groups:

- i Carer prepared, labelled and stored daily medicines for breakthrough symptoms
- ii Registered nurse prepared and labelled daily medicines for carers to store for subsequent breakthrough symptoms
- iii Clinical trial pharmacist prepared and labelled daily medicines for carers to store for subsequent breakthrough symptoms.

Results show that trained carers can confidently administer subcutaneous medicines regardless of whether a carer, nurse or pharmacist prepares medicines and that confidence increases with injecting experience.

These findings indicate that with appropriate training, using high quality resources, carers can be integrated into the palliative care community team to confidently help manage breakthrough symptoms.

This finding is being applied through the [*caring@home project*](#), a National Palliative Care Project funded by the Australian Government, that has developed a suite of resources to assist service providers to support carers help manage breakthrough symptoms safely using subcutaneous medicines.

1. Swerissen H, Duckett S. *Dying well*. Grattan Institute. ISBN: 978-1-925015-61-4. Available from:<https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/815-dying-well.pdf>. [Accessed 17 May 2019].
2. Healy S, Israel F, Charles M, Reymond L. An educational package that supports laycarers to safely manage breakthrough subcutaneous injections for home-based palliative care patients: Development and evaluation of a service quality improvement. *Palliat Med*. 2013;27(6):562-570.
3. Israel F, Reymond L, Slade G, Menadue S, Charles MA. Lay caregivers' perspectives on injecting subcutaneous medications at home. *Int J Palliat Nurs*. 2008; 14(8):390-395.
4. Healy S, Israel F, Charles M, Reymond L. Laycarers can confidently prepare and administer subcutaneous injections for palliative care patients at home: A randomized controlled trial. *Palliat Med*. 2018; 32(7):1208-1215.