

Community pharmacists

Towards the end of life, home-based patients may lose the ability to swallow and therefore need subcutaneous medicines for symptom control. Their carers need to know how to manage those medicines.

Resources produced by *caring@home* assist community pharmacists to support carers who are caring for a person requiring palliative care at home.

The resources, targeted to community service providers, health care professionals and carers, aim to support carers to help safely manage breakthrough symptoms that require subcutaneous medicines.

The resources are applicable in all jurisdictions across Australia.

Why teach carers to manage subcutaneous medicines?

One of the most frequent reasons that community-based palliative patients are transferred to inpatient units in the last weeks of life is because their symptoms cannot be adequately controlled at home. ^[1]

Research confirms that with standardised support from health professionals and adequate information and resources, carers can be taught the skills to help manage breakthrough symptoms safely for the person for whom they are caring. ^[2,3]

Importantly, carers report feeling a great deal of satisfaction from contributing to symptom control and that it impacts positively on their bereavement. ^[4]

Resources to support community pharmacists

Pharmacists play an important role in the support the carers who are looking after home-based palliative care patients. This can be through stocking medicines required by the patient and providing advice, within their scope of practice, to carers about subcutaneous medicines.

Resources to support community pharmacists in this role include:

- A consensus-based list of medicines suitable for use in the community for managing terminal symptoms
- palliMEDs – an app based on the consensus-based list of medicines.

caring@home aims to improve the quality of palliative care service delivery across Australia by developing resources that will support people to be cared for and to die at home, if that is their choice.

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The project is conducted by a consortium: [RACGP](#), [NPS](#), [BSPCC](#) (lead), [PSA](#), [APNA](#), [CareSearch](#), [LASA](#), [ACSA](#) and [UTS](#).



“...we knew when the pain hit we were able to do something to try to relieve it immediately without having to sit waiting powerless for someone else to come and do it. I believe it gave me the confidence to keep him at home to the very end.” ^[4]

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caring@home resources

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| Community service providers | Guidelines for the handling of palliative care medicines in community services | These guidelines can be used by community service providers to inform the development of detailed protocols and procedures tailored to the requirements of individual services. |
| | Example policy and procedures: <i>Supporting carers to help manage breakthrough symptoms safely using subcutaneous medicines in the home</i> | This document may be used by community service providers to develop and/or review relevant documentation within their own organisation's policy and procedure framework. |
| Health care professionals | Online education modules | The online education aims to educate nurses about how to train carers to manage breakthrough symptoms safely using subcutaneous medicines. |
| | palliMEDS | This app familiarises primary care prescribers and community pharmacists with eight palliative care medicines used for management of terminal symptoms. |
| | Palliative care symptom management medicines for Australians living in the community | A consensus-based list of medicines suitable for use in the community for the management of terminal symptoms. |
| Carers | A practical handbook for carers: <i>Helping to manage breakthrough symptoms safely using subcutaneous medicines</i> | The handbook provides written and pictorial material with all the information a carer needs to help manage breakthrough symptoms safely using subcutaneous medicines. |
| | Writing a label, opening an ampoule and drawing up medicine: <i>A step-by-step guide</i> | This illustrated guide explains how to label a syringe correctly, open an ampoule and draw up medicine using a step-by-step approach. |
| | Giving medicine using a subcutaneous cannula: <i>A step-by-step guide</i> | This illustrated guide explains how to give medicine through a subcutaneous cannula using a step-by-step approach. |
| | Medicines diary | The medicines diary is for carers to record all the subcutaneous medicines that are given. |
| | Colour-coded labelling system | The colour-coded labelling system acts as a safety check to ensure the correct medicine is given for each breakthrough symptom. It includes sticky labels for syringes and the Symptoms and medicines: <i>Colour-coded fridge chart</i> . |
| | A practice demonstration kit | The demonstration kit is used to practise giving medicines through a subcutaneous cannula. |
| | Short training videos | The videos show how to do each step when giving a subcutaneous medicine. |

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