



Association for
Palliative Medicine
Of Great Britain and Ireland



Royal College of
General Practitioners



The Association of Supportive
and Palliative Care Pharmacy



Priority medicines for palliative and end of life care during a pandemic

During the coronavirus pandemic, additional demand on some medicines and other supplies is inevitable. The demand for drugs used, especially for managing symptoms frequently seen in people infected with coronavirus, will increase.

This guidance sets out a small set of key medicines for palliative and end of life care that need to be managed nationally with local collaboration across all sectors.

This has been produced in conjunction with the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer and National Clinical Director for End of Life Care at NHS England and NHS Improvement. Although direct alternative drugs are offered, the options identified are not exhaustive and local formularies may continue to guide decisions where stocks are available.

This formulary covers use of medicines for palliative and end of life care across all sectors.

Operational principles

- Palliative care clinicians and Chief pharmacists should work together to review and reallocate medicine stock supplies from areas where clinical demand is less
- The oral route should be used if patients are able to swallow
- Due to regional variation in practice, first and second line options may be used interchangeably
- Pharmacological options may be used to treat more than one symptom, e.g. haloperidol used for delirium as well as anti-emetic
- If patients are enrolled in a COVID-19 treatment clinical trial, then drug interactions with any of the drugs listed will need be considered prior to prescribing
- Where the usual first line treatment is being substituted for an alternative, we would recommend that these changes are discussed with the patient and/or their carer, as is usual practice.

Priority medicines for palliative and end of life care:

Indication	1st option	2 nd option
Breathlessness, Pain	Morphine (PO MR & IR, SC)	Oxycodone (PO MR & IR, SC) for patients with e-GFR <30 ml/min
Fever	Paracetamol (PO)	Paracetamol (PR)
Anxiety	Lorazepam (PO) Midazolam (SC)	Levomepromazine (PO/SC)
Delirium	Haloperidol (PO/SC)	Levomepromazine (PO/SC)
Anti-emetic	Haloperidol (PO/SC)	Levomepromazine (PO/SC)
Cough	Codeine linctus (PO)	Morphine (PO/IR)
Noisy breathing, Colic	Hyoscine butylbromide (SC)	Glycopyrronium (SC)