

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE USER

Guide on how to administer a distress prescription for the family looking after a person at the end of life

Why administer a distress prescription?

Sometimes, at the end of life, a patient may show significant symptoms of distress. In spite of the fact that **this situation is rare**, as someone close to this person, it is preferable that you be prepared **so that you can relieve this distress** rapidly.

The distress prescription provided to persons at the end of life is composed of three medications which must be administered one after another.

- Versed: a calmant with an effect on memory;
- Morphine or hydromorphone (Dilaudid): reduces the sensation of respiratory difficulty, the rate of respiration and pain;
- Scopolamine: reduces secretions, respiratory effort and has an effect on memory.

By giving the three medications together, you **put the person to sleep** (sedative effect). When he/she awakens, **there will be little or no memory** of the distress that he/she has just experienced (amnesiac effect).

In view of the person's terminal condition, it is possible that, after administering the distress prescription designed to offer relief, the person may not wake up again. Death is then attributed to the deterioration of the person's condition and not to the medication administered.

When should the distress prescription be administered?

The distress prescription should be administered when there is:

- severe and acute difficulty in breathing **with several of the following symptoms:**
 - **Intolerable and constant** difficulty in breathing when at rest;
 - Attention obsessed by the need to seek air (catch one's breath);
 - Very rapid rate of respiration (more than 28 breaths per minute);
 - Marked effort to speak 2 or 3 words;
 - Intense anxiety, fear of dying.
- **Almost constant agitation** between attempts to sit up and lie down, and the inability to maintain a position;
- Haemorrhaging, abundant bleeding from the mouth, ears, nose, rectum, a wound, etc.

How to administer the distress prescription

- Give the 3 syringes of prepared medication, one after another, following the order provided by the nurse.
- Use the butterfly installed and identified for this purpose.
- Contact the nurse before or after administering the medication (see communication sheet). She can come to find you and continue the follow up with the physician and yourself.
- The administered medications take 10 to 15 minutes before acting. Their effect lasts from 2 to 4 hours.
- Sometimes it is necessary to administer the 3 medications again if the symptoms persist.
- Most people will sleep deeply following the administration of these medications.

**It is important to remember that you have relieved
your relative's symptoms of distress.**