Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) for Older Children

**Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)**

PCA is often given to patients after a major operation. If this type of pain relief is a good idea for you, the anaesthetist (doctor who looks after you while you are asleep during your operation) will discuss this with you before your operation. You will then wake up from your operation connected to a PCA pump.

**The PCA pump**

The PCA pump contains pain relieving medicine, which you will receive when you press a button on a special handset. The medicine then goes into a special tube in your arm, known as an intra-venous drip.

**Safety measures**

Only a set amount of medicine will be given to you via the PCA pump at any one time. For safety, the doctors work out this amount according to your age and weight.

Whenever you have pain, you should press the button on your handset. There is then a 5-minute break before you will be able to use the pump again and receive more medicine. This is known as a lock-out period and is a safety measure to stop you from having too much medicine.

**Benefits of PCA**

PCA means you have greater control over your pain relief because you do not have to wait for the nurses to give you medicine. Although the nurses will give you oral medication in addition to your PCA to keep you comfortable.

**Medicines used in PCA**

Generally morphine or a similar medicine is used in PCA. To try to improve your comfort even further, other pain relieving medicine is usually given to you regularly (see page 2).

**Side effects of PCA medicines**

Sometimes you will experience side effects from the medicine used in PCA.

- **Sickness** - please tell your nurse if you feel sick. We can give you medicine for this problem if it does not go away.

- **Itching** - again, we can give you medicine to help with this.

- **Drowsiness** - this is normal so please do not worry. If sleepiness is a problem however, we can give you less PCA medicine, which will help. We will give you other medicines for pain relief to make sure you are as comfortable as possible.

- **Respiratory depression**, or slowing down of breathing, is the most serious side effect of opioid medicines. For this reason your nurse will check on you frequently while you are having opioids to make sure this is not a problem. There is a medicine available to give to you if you do experience abnormal breathing. This is known as an antidote and makes using this type of medicine safer.

Your doctor will be happy to discuss these and any other possible side effects of PCA medicines with you and your parents.

While you have a PCA and for a short time after it has been removed, you will probably be visited by one of our pain control nurses. These nurses
are there to work with you and the ward staff to make sure you are as comfortable as possible.

We hope this leaflet is of some help to you. If there is anything else we can do to help make your stay more comfortable, please let us know.

Pain glossary

- **Acute pain** - short term pain.
- **Analgesia** - pain relieving medicine.
- **Anti-emetics** - anti-sickness medicine.
- **Chronic pain** - long term pain.
- **Intra-muscular medication (IM)** - injection into a muscle.
- **Intra-venous medication (IV)** - injection into a vein.
- **Oral medication** - medicine given in the mouth.
- **Sub-cutaneous medication (S/C)** - injection into the skin tissue.
- **Laxatives** - medicine to relieve constipation.
- **Per-rectum medication (PR)** - medicine given into the patient’s back passage.

**Different pain medicines**

- **Paracetamol** - oral/IV pain medicine for milder pain. Side effects are rare, except liver damage in overdose.
- **Ibuprofen** - oral pain medicine, works well with paracetamol. Occasionally causes breathing difficulties in patients with asthma. Can cause tummy aches, dizziness or rashes.
- **Diclofenac** - strong oral/PR pain medicine similar to ibuprofen but stronger. Cannot be given at the same time as ibuprofen. Side effects as for ibuprofen.
- **Tramadol** - strong oral medicine that can be given in an injection if needed. It is recommended for bad pain and is sometimes given with a PCA. Tramadol tends to be used in older children only. It can cause sickness and dizziness.