

SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

Being accessible, community pharmacists will often be the first to hear of swallowing concerns and are well placed to provide advice. This is a continuation of [Part 2 \(160kb pdf\)](#).

Wayne

Wayne was diagnosed with a head and neck cancer, with metastases. He has developed painful swallowing as a result of palliative radiotherapy. His current medicines include:

- > Fentanyl 100 microgram/hour and Fentanyl 12 microgram/hour patches every third day
- > Morphine 10mg/mL oral solution, 35 mg every 4 hours as required for pain
- > Lidocaine (lignocaine) hydrochloride 2% oral liquid, 15 mL every 3 hours prn
- > Venlafaxine 75 mg (CR) daily
- > Coloxyl and Senna 2 twice a day

You have enquired with him how he is taking the venlafaxine.

Dysphagia

Swallowing requires the respiratory, oral, pharyngeal, laryngeal and oesophageal functions to perform concurrently. This can be challenged by physical and cognitive issues. Swallowing difficulty can occur in all age groups and may be temporary or ongoing, with impact on how food, drink and orally administered medicines are taken. This can result in poor compliance.

Responding to dysphagia

It is important to consider:

- > If the medication is still indicated and required;
- > If the tablet or capsule can be swallowed whole with yogurt or a lubricant such as Gloup®? (Caution: check for drug-food interactions);
- > If the tablet can either be dispersed or crushed or the capsule opened, and administered in water or on soft food.
- > If the taste will be unpleasant, and if the taste needs masking? For example, bitter medicines can be disguised with a variety of flavours including: cherry, chocolate, lemon, raspberry, and orange;

- > If written instructions are required to assist the person administering the medication to recall how to prepare and administer it.

You learn that Wayne has been crushing the CR venlafaxine, as well as the coloxyl with senna.

Provide Advice

You refer to the resource *Don't Rush to Crush*. As a controlled release product, crushing the venlafaxine is inappropriate. The suggestion is switching to the Efexor XR® brand. While the capsule cannot be divided, crushed or chewed, the contents can be opened and sprinkled on soft food (e.g. yoghurt or apple sauce). The pellets within the capsule must be swallowed without chewing. Other venlafaxine brands contain larger pellets, which makes them unsuitable for people with swallowing difficulties.

While the coloxyl and senna can be crushed, the taste is likely to be unpleasant. Other options to recommend include: Laxettes with Senna® chocolate squares or Nulax®.

Out of courtesy, you contact Wayne's prescriber to inform them of the issue.

Guiding patients and their caregivers in how to manage medicines, when the person is struggling to swallow, can have a profound effect on patients comfort/condition.

Useful Resources

- > [Don't Rush To Crush](#)
- > [MIMS Online](#)

For more information

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