

COVID- 19 (novel coronavirus)

End of Life Care Information for Aged Residential Care

RESPIRATORY TRACT SECRETIONS

Respiratory tract secretions (RTS) are common in dying people who are too weak to expectorate and are no longer able to clear their oral and upper airway secretions. The pooled secretions in the oropharynx and bronchi vibrate as air moves over them. It is audible and is described as noisy, rattling, gurgling and unpleasant. The sound can be a source of distress for families, whānau and caregivers.

Individual Assessment

- Consider the person's diagnosis, i.e. the person has risk factors that may increase airway secretions (COVID 19 is a risk factor)
- Consider the distress of the person - are they restless or frowning
- Listen to the breathing and any evidence of secretions in the mouth or airway
- Consider the distress of the person's family and whānau - they may be anxious and fear the person is choking or drowning. Many relatives and friends who witness this find the noise of respiratory tract secretions distressing.

Non-Pharmacological Management of Respiratory Tract Secretions

- Repositioning the resident from side to side with the head of the bed slightly elevated to help move the secretions and reduce the noise
- Carefully assess hydration and reduce or cease parenteral fluids
- Excellent mouth and lip care and encourage family and whānau to be involved (lubricating mouth gels, cleaning teeth, oral swabs and lip balm)
- Support with reassurance and a calm and compassionate presence
- Provide a consistent explanation of the cause to alleviate the concerns of family and whānau
- Use of background noise e.g. music or radio, to distract from the sound
- Use of a mouth swab to scoop out/remove oral secretions
- Aromatherapy such as essential oils in a vaporiser may be helpful (Eucalyptus, lavender, lemon, cypress etc.)
- Tracheal suction should be avoided at all times

Pharmacological Management of Respiratory Tract Secretions

- Anticholinergic medication, e.g. Hyoscine N- butyl bromide (Buscopan) may decrease secretions if commenced at the first sign of the symptom. Side effects include increased risk of urinary retention and increased dry mouth so medication should be stopped if there is no reduction in secretions
- Hyoscine hydro bromide (Scopoderm patch) may cause delirium

Please contact Arohanui Hospice for advice required to support residents at the end of life with COVID 19. Advice may include how to manage dyspnoea at the EOL with the use of prn medication (without a syringe driver)