

Notes of a Meeting held on Tuesday 17th December 1991 at Redclyffe Annexe for staff who had concerns related to the use of Diamorphine within the unit.

PRESENT

Mrs. Evans, Patient Care Manager  
Dr. Logan, Consultant, Geriatrician  
Dr. Barton, Clinical Assistant  
Sister Hamblin  
S.N. Donne  
S.N. Barrett  
S.N. Giffin  
S.N. Tubbritt  
E.N. Wigfall  
E.N. Turnbull

All trained staff were invited to the meeting if they were concerned with this issue, no apologies were received.

Mrs. Evans opened the meeting by thanking everyone for coming and highlighting the following:-

1. A staff meeting was held on 11th July 1991 to establish all staff's concerns re: the use of Diamorphine for terminal patients at Redclyffe Annexe.
2. A second meeting was held on 20th August where Steve King, Nurse Manager, Elderly Services Q.A.H. and Dr. Logan spoke to the staff on drug control of symptoms. The aim of this meeting was to allay staff's fears by explaining the reasons for prescribing. As no one challenged any statements at this meeting or raised any queries, it was assumed the problem had been resolved and no further action was planned.

A recent report from a meeting held with Gerrie Whitney, Community Tutor, indicated some staff still had concerns, so a further meeting was planned for 17th December 1991.

3. Staff were invited to give details of cases they had been concerned over but no information was received; it was therefore decided to talk to staff on the general issue of symptom control and all trained staff would be invited to attend.
4. This issue had put a great deal of stress on everyone particularly the medical staff, it has the potential of being detrimental to patient care and relative's peace of mind and could undermine the good work being done in the unit if allowed to get out of hand. Everyone was therefore urged to take part in discussions and help reach an agreement on how to proceed in future.
5. Staff were asked to bear in mind that the subject was both sensitive and emotive and to make their comments as objective as possible.

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As Mrs. Evans had presented staff's concerns she stated the problem as she saw it and invited staff to comment if they did not agree with her interpretation:-

1. We have an increasing number of patients requiring terminal care.
2. Everyone agrees that our main aim with these patients is to relieve their symptoms and allow them a peaceful and dignified death.
3. The prescribing of Diamorphine to patients with easily recognised severe pain has not been questioned.
4. What is questioned is the appropriateness of prescribing diamorphine for other symptoms or less obvious pain.
5. No one was questioning the amounts of Diamorphine or suggesting that doses were inappropriate.

All present agreed with these statements, no other comments were asked to be considered.

Mrs. Evans then reminded staff that at the July meeting it had been agreed that she neither had the authority or knowledge to write a policy on the prescribing of drugs, but she would be happy to talk to staff at the end of the meeting if any member of staff had concerns relating to the administration of drugs which was not amply covered by the District Drug Manual or U.K.C.C. Administration of Medicines. Dr. Logan then spoke to the staff at length on symptom control covering the following points:-

- a. First priority was to establish cause of symptom and remove cause if possible.
- b. Where appropriate the 'sliding scale' of analgesics should be used.
- c. Oral medication should be used where possible and when effective (this raised the issue of the availability of Hyoscine as an oral preparation).
- d. The aim of opiate usage was to produce comfort and tranquility at the smallest necessary dose - an unreceptive patient is not the prime objective.
- e. The limited range of suitable drugs available if normal range of analgesics not effective.
- f. That Diamorphine had added benefits of producing a feeling of well being in the patient.
- g. The difficulty of accurately assessing levels of discomfort with patients who were not able to express themselves fully or who had multiple medical problems. The decision to prescribe for these patients had therefore to be made on professional judgement based on knowledge of patients condition, to enable patient to be nursed comfortably.
- h. It was not acceptable for patients who are deteriorating terminally, and require 2 hrly turning, to have pain or distress during this process. They require analgesia even if they are content between these times.

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Following general discussion and answering of staff questions Dr. Logan stated he would be willing to speak to any member of staff who still had concerns over prescribed treatment, after speaking to Dr. Barton or Sister Hamblin. Comments raised during discussion were:-

- (a) All staff had a great respect for Dr. Barton and did not question her professional judgement.
- (b) The night staff present did not feel that their opinions of patients condition were considered before prescribing of Diamorphine.
- (c) That patients were not always comfortable during the day even if they had slept during the night.
- (d) There appeared to be a lack of communication causing some of the problem.
- (e) Some staff feared that it was becoming routine to prescribe diamorphine to patients that were dying regardless of their symptoms.

All staff agreed that if they had concerns in future related to the prescribing of drugs they would approach Dr. Barton or Sister Hamblin in the first instance for explanation, following which if they were still concerned they could speak to Dr. Logan.

Mrs. Evans stated she would also be happy for staff to talk to her if they had any problems they wanted advice on.

With no further points raised, Dr. Barton, Dr. Logan, Sister Hamblin and S.N. Barrett left the meeting to commence Ward rounds.

Mrs. Evans spoke to the remaining nursing staff.

Staff were asked if they felt there was any need for a policy relating to nursing practice on this issue. No one present felt this was appropriate. Mrs. Evans stated she was concerned over the manner in which these concerns had been raised as it had made people feel very threatened and defensive and stressed the need to present concerns in the agreed manner in future. She agreed with staff that there did seem to be a communication problem within the unit, particularly between day and night staff which had possibly been made worse by recent events. Mrs. Evans had already met with both the Day and Night Sisters in an attempt to identify problem and she advised staff to go ahead with planned staff meetings and offered to present staff's views from both Day and Night staff if they felt this would be useful. Mrs. Evans spoke to Sister Hamblin and S.N. Barrett the following morning to ask them to organise day staffs views and ask them to make every effort to ensure patients assessments were both objective and clearly recorded in nursing records.

Mrs. Evans would arrange a further meeting with both Night Sisters and Sister Hamblin following the staff meeting to ensure problems have been resolved with information handover from Day to Night Staff and vice versa.