Amitriptyline – Palliative Care (Adults)

Contents

1. Overview .................................................................................................................. 1
2. Presentation .............................................................................................................. 1
3. Indications ............................................................................................................... 1
4. Dose ......................................................................................................................... 2
5. Administration ......................................................................................................... 2
6. Observation and Monitoring .................................................................................... 2
7. Mechanism of Action .............................................................................................. 2
8. Contraindications and Precautions ........................................................................ 3
9. Possible Adverse Effects ......................................................................................... 3
10. Drug Interactions .................................................................................................... 3
11. References .............................................................................................................. 4

1. Overview

Purpose
This protocol outlines the administration, prescribing and monitoring of amitriptyline at Waitemata District Health Board.

Scope
All medical and nursing staff

Note: Consider using nortriptyline. Its anticholinergic effects are less potent and it is less sedating than amitriptyline so may be better tolerated.

2. Presentation

Amitriptyline 10mg, 25mg and 50mg tablets

3. Indications

Licensed:
- Depression

Unlicensed:
- Neuropathic pain, bladder spasms, drooling and sialorrhoea

This information is correct at date of issue. Always check on Waitemata DHB Controlled Documents site that this is the most recent version.
Amitriptyline – Palliative Care (Adults)

4. Dose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indication</th>
<th>Dose</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neuropathic Pain</td>
<td>• 10-50mg nocte&lt;br&gt;• Start with 10mg nocte and increase according to response and sensitivity&lt;br&gt;• Will take 3-7 days to take effect&lt;br&gt;• If necessary and the patient can tolerate it, after 3-7 days increase to 25mg nocte, then after 1-2 weeks increase to 50mg nocte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>• 50-150mg nocte&lt;br&gt;• Start with 10mg nocte and increase slowly (doses of up to 200mg may be used)&lt;br&gt;• Will take 3-4 weeks to take effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drooling and sialorrhoea</td>
<td>• Dose as per neuropathic pain&lt;br&gt;• Start with 10mg nocte&lt;br&gt;• The benefit is from the antimuscarinic action of amitriptyline so switching to nortriptyline is unhelpful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Nortriptyline is also used widely for Palliative Care patients and possibly has less side effects (refer Nortriptyline policy). It is just as effective as amitriptyline for depression and neuropathic pain.

5. Administration

- Only available in oral preparation.
- Peak plasma levels can be 2 – 12 hours after oral administration so doses should be given in early evening (up to 2 hours before bedtime) to reduce excessive morning sedation.

6. Observation and Monitoring

- Monitor for constipation, dry mouth, urinary retention, increased confusion and excessive sedation.
- Consider blood pressure monitoring when starting amitriptyline if at risk of postural hypotension e.g. if patient taking cardiac medications.

7. Mechanism of Action

Amitriptyline is a tricyclic antidepressant which blocks the pre-synaptic re-uptake of serotonin and noradrenaline. It may also act as a NMDA-receptor antagonist and has a sedative effect which helps to improve sleep.
8. Contraindications and Precautions

Contraindications

- Hypersensitivity to amitriptyline or nortriptyline
- Acute recovery phase following a myocardial infarction

Precautions

- Elderly
- Delirium
- Cardiac disease
- Arrhythmias
- History of seizures
- Hepatic impairment
- History of mania
- Narrow angle glaucoma
- History of urinary retention
- Hyponatraemia

The potential for tricyclics to cause delirium is high (due to anticholinergic activity) and great care should be exercised when using these agents in the frail elderly, agitated patients or in patients on multiple other medications.

9. Possible Adverse Effects

- Dry mouth
- Blurred vision
- Mydriasis
- Increased intraocular pressure
- Constipation
- Paralytic ileus
- Urinary retention
- Arrhythmias
- Tachycardia
- Postural hypotension
- Hyponatraemia
- Palpitations
- Non-specific ECG changes
- Restlessness
- Sedation
- Insomnia
- Confusional state (delirium)

10. Drug Interactions

- Monoamine oxidase inhibitors
- Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)
- Other anticholinergic medications
- Sympathomimetic medications
- Central nervous system depressants
- Medications that prolong the QTc interval
- Other antidepressants
Amitriptyline – Palliative Care (Adults)

11. References

1. Medsafe Website – Amitriptyline Datasheet.


3. New Zealand Formulary online, release 46-1 April 2016 – Amitriptyline hydrochloride monograph.