Information Sheet – Using a Syringe Driver

For patients and carers

Palliative Care Service

What is a syringe driver?
It is a portable pump that delivers medication under the skin slowly (usually over 24 hours).

The medication controls pain and other symptoms, such as nausea and vomiting.

Why do I need a syringe driver?
• A syringe driver will help if you are having trouble swallowing medication, or have been vomiting, or your other medications aren’t working to control your symptoms.
• It’s just another way for you to have medications to keep you as comfortable as possible.

How does it work?
• The syringe driver delivers the medication slowly through a small plastic tube (called a cannula) into the space just under the skin.
• The medications are easily absorbed into your body to help control your symptoms.
• Your doctor will prescribe your medications as normal. Your nurse will usually refill or ‘load’ the medication into the syringe driver for you every day.
• The nurse will also change the cannula for you each week.

Will I need to do anything special to look after the syringe driver?
• There is a small green light that flashes regularly and a message on the screen that says “pump infusing”. These signs will tell you that the syringe driver is working properly. It is a good idea to check these signs about four times a day.
• The machine uses a 9-volt battery. The battery will need to be changed every couple of days. The visiting nurse will do this for you, or teach you how to do it yourself if you wish.
• It is a good idea to practice changing the battery when the nurse is present so you are comfortable to do it yourself.

IMPORTANT: The syringe driver must be kept dry so that it continues to work properly. Please keep it away from water.

Interpreter available - The Health Care Interpreter Service provides a free and confidential interpreting service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you need an interpreter, please tell your service provider immediately and they can book one for you in your preferred language.
### Can I walk around with the syringe driver and wear normal clothes?
- Yes - you can walk around with a syringe driver and wear normal clothes.
- The nurse can lend you a bag with a shoulder strap to put the syringe driver in, so you can walk around with your hands free while the syringe driver is attached to you.
- It is important to consider the cannula when choosing the clothes you want to wear. For example, if the cannula is located in your stomach, wearing belts or tight waisted clothes may rub on the cannula. It is also good to maintain easy access to the cannula site.

### How will I have a shower?
- **Do not put the syringe driver in or near water.**
- The syringe driver needs to be turned off before you shower and turned on again afterwards.
- It is important to practice turning it off and on again when the nurse is present so that you are comfortable to do this yourself.
- Do not attempt to turn the syringe driver on or off until the nurse has taught you.
- Turning off the syringe driver for a short period of time will not affect your treatment.

### What if I still get some symptoms even though I am using the syringe driver?
- You may still get some symptoms such as pain or nausea. If this happens you may need some extra injections to help control your symptoms. We call this “breakthrough medication”.
- The extra medication should get your symptoms under control. **Tell your doctor or nurse if you need regular breakthrough medication, as you may need a higher dose of medication put into the syringe driver instead.**

### What will I do if something happens to the syringe driver?
We have set up alarms on the machine to remind us when to do certain tasks. The alarm will sound if:

1. The **medication is due to finish** within 15 minutes. A sign on the machine will say “near end”. The nurse will arrive at (or around) this time. If he/she is more than 30 minutes late please call him/her.
2. The **tube is tangled** (and isn’t letting the medication through). Gently untangle the tube and press the ‘YES’ button until the screen shows ‘Start infusion?’ Press YES again to restart the driver.
3. The **battery is flat**. You can change the battery if you have been shown how to by the nurse.

If you are unable to fix the problem or are worried please contact the nurse on the number in your home folder.

When the syringe driver is not in use, please keep it in a safe place out of reach of children and pets (such as a locked cupboard).

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This information sheet was adapted by ISLHD Palliative Care Service (2014) from a booklet called ‘Things you might want to know about your driver or pump’ developed by the Centre for Palliative Care Research and Education and Palliative Care Australia.

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