

# New Community Protocol for Administration of Ketamine

A new protocol for Ketamine administration in the community has been developed for Waterloo Wellington (WW). Based on Grand River Hospital's clinical policy for Ketamine administration in palliative care and current best practice, this new protocol will allow patients receiving Ketamine infusions in hospital the option to be discharged home into the community.

To ensure our patients transition safely from acute care to community, the WW Ketamine Education Group developed a self-learning package for nurses involved in the monitoring and care of patients receiving Ketamine. This comprehensive reference and teaching guide includes essential information about pain management, Ketamine pharmacology, monitoring and documentation, self-assessment quizzes as well as a competency assessment guide for nursing agencies.

## **A Bit About Ketamine**

Ketamine is an anaesthetic agent, however when used in very low doses it can act as a co-analgesic to treat pain in palliative care. Ketamine is a potent non-competitive N-methyl D-aspartate (NMDA) receptor antagonist. Research suggests that hyperactivity of the NMDA receptors may be involved in the induction and maintenance of certain pain states such as neuropathic pain and hyperalgesia. In low doses, Ketamine increases the action of the mu-receptors, making them more receptive to opioids. In this way, it may decrease or even reverse opioid tolerance due to blocking of NMDA receptors.

For this reason, Ketamine may be effective in treating specific neuropathic syndromes as well as palliative patients who demonstrate opioid intolerance or toxicity, experience pain crisis or suffer with pain that is poorly responsive to opioids. However, it is important to note that all other conventional analgesic combinations should be used prior to considering Ketamine.

An improved response to opioids may lead to increased opioid side effects such as sedation and respiratory depression if the opioid dose is not adjusted appropriately, so careful monitoring is essential. As part of the Waterloo Wellington (WW) protocol, Ketamine will always be initiated, titrated and stabilized within hospital, under the guidance of a Palliative Care Physician prior to the patient being discharged home. When in the community, the patient must have 24/7 access to palliative care services, including coverage by a Palliative Care Physician and monitoring by trained community nurses.

The community Ketamine protocol is a pilot initiative and will include 5 case studies for review and evaluation prior to adoption of the final draft. For more information about the protocol or self-learning package, please contact HPC Consultation Services at 519 743 4114 in Waterloo Region and 519 823 2550 ext. 2301 in Wellington County.

Reference: Waterloo Wellington Ketamine Education Committee. (2010). The Waterloo Wellington Palliative Care Community Protocol for Ketamine Administration.