Morphine Facts for Hospice Patients

Many people have concerns and fears about taking morphine and other opioids. This is often because of misconceptions or a lack of information.

Virtually every authoritative body from the World Health Organization to the United States Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Health Care Policy and Research agrees that medications like morphine are best for treating moderate to severe pain.

In hospice patients opioids are the most commonly used medications in the management of moderate to severe pain because of their effectiveness, ease of dosing, and very minimal risk of severe side effects compared to how beneficial they are.

Morphine and other medications like morphine are very safe when used correctly. Hospice patients are able to utilize these medications safely for many reasons.

- All Arbor Hospice staff receive extensive training in how these medications work in the body to relieve pain, how to give safe doses of the medication and which patients would benefit from taking these medications.

- The hospice pharmacy has licensed pharmacists who double-check all medications ordered for you. Working with the Arbor Hospice Medical Directors, team staff and your attending physician, the pharmacists collaborate to ensure that you receive safe, effective medication therapy based on your individual need.

- After patients have been on medications like morphine for a while their bodies adjust and higher doses may be needed to provide relief. This can be done safely without causing long-term side effects. Just as people often need changes in blood pressure medicine over time, people often need changes in their pain medication.

- Unlike other pain relievers, such as Acetaminophen (Tylenol) and Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), there is no limit to an opioid dose and therefore dosages can safely continue to increase throughout the disease progression.
• Since the body can become tolerant to the effects of opioids, the right dose of morphine is that which controls pain. This dose can easily be given without causing unmanageable or dangerous side effects.

• Side effects with any medication are possible. Fortunately those associated with pain medications go away quickly and can be prevented or treated.

• Addiction very rarely, if ever, occurs in patients who take medications for pain. Research has shown that less than 1% of all patients who take medications like morphine for pain develop any signs of addiction.

• Arbor Hospice staff, along with your physician, follow dosing standards suggested by the World Health Organization, the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research and the American and International Pain Societies. These dosing standards have been proven safe in numerous studies.

Arbor Hospice staff is always available to answer any questions you may have about your pain medications. Never suffer in pain or discontinue taking medications because you have questions or are afraid of the medications ordered for you. If you have any questions, call your Arbor Hospice nurse.