

Alfentanil Spray (Alfentanil 'cutaneous solution') professional information sheet

This is a spray formulation delivering small doses of alfentanil and is supplied with a spray attachment for use via the buccal or nasal route. We have been using it mainly buccally on the in-patient unit at St Christophers for a number of years before the introduction of the licensed fast-acting fentanyl products for 'incident pain'. Alfentanil is a lipophilic opioid, so is absorbed through the skin and reaches the circulation rapidly. It also has a short duration of action and this makes it ideal for situations where patients experience sudden, short increases of pain, perhaps due to movement or in association with procedures. Some small studies have been carried out on the use of fentanyl in similar circumstances (Zeppetella G, 2000, 2001) and there are many references to support its use for short procedures in children. There is also some experience with using these short-acting opiates for breathlessness (Harlos 2002). Torbay Hospital Pharmacy, a licenced manufacturing unit developed a product following requests, particularly from Palliative Care Units wishing to use alfentanil sublingually and intranasally. Since licensed buccal and nasal fentanyl products became available the use of this product has decreased but it remains useful for occasional patients on lower background opioid doses.

This product should only be initiated in patients already using opioids for pain and any co-existing oral or nasal condition may need to be considered by the prescriber. Each bottle contains 5mg alfentanil in 5ml and each spray from the pump delivers 0.14mg in 0.14ml. The starting dose is 1 –2 sprays onto the inside of the cheek or into the nostrils, but this has been increased to 4, 6 or 8 sprays if necessary. Separate sheets are available on request, which contain a) details of assembly and use of the spray b) instructions for ordering and recording on a ward and c) a Patient Information Leaflet.

This preparation may be prescribed by GP on an FP10 but needs to be ordered by a community pharmacist by faxing an order or copy of an FP10 to Torbay Hospital. The price has recently increased nearly ten-fold and one bottle costs £87, which makes it commensurate with other fast-acting products, which cost approximately £5 per dose. Orders are sent by standard post and can take up to 5 working days between ordering and receipt. If an urgent delivery is necessary there is an additional charge for this.

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References

1. Zeppetella G. Sublingual fentanyl citrate for cancer-related breakthrough pain: a pilot study. Palliative Medicine Jul 2001, 15(4) 323-8
2. Zeppetella G. An assessment of the safety, efficacy and acceptability of intranasal fentanyl citrate in the management of cancer –related breakthrough pain: a pilot study. JPSM 2000, 20(4) 253-8
3. Zeppetella G. Nebulised and intranasal fentanyl in the management of cancer-related breakthrough pain. Palliative Medicine Jan 2000, 14(1) 57-8
4. Harlos M. Palliative Care Incident Pain and Incident Dyspnea Protocol. On line access at <http://palliative.info/IncidentPain.htm> - further reference list also available at this site.

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