The Palliative Care Handbook

Incorporating the Nurse Maude Palliative Care Formulary Guidelines for clinical management and symptom control

4th Edition

Prof. Rod Macleod, Jane Vella-Brincat and Dr AD (Sandy) Macleod.

Review by **Ms Anne Denton,** palliative care pharmacist

This handbook is a valuable, ready reference for health professionals involved in palliative care within New Zealand. It will be particularly useful for those new to the field or working in isolated practices without easy access to a specialist palliative care unit.

The book starts with a brief description of palliative care aims and includes the World Health Organization definition. The contents page lists three sections within the book. It would have been helpful to have these sections identified in the body of the book.

The first section addresses a number of symptoms commonly met in palliative care. It includes suggested guidelines for treatment and the drug therapy that may be appropriate. This section is written clearly and concisely. The information is useful and directive, but without explanation.

The formulary section contains a vast amount of practical and useful drug information, drug costs, availability, special authorities, brands etc. A cautionary warning for those using the formulary is that frequent changes to the pharmaceutical schedules since publication of this handbook mean information that was accurate at the time of printing may now be out of date. Some of the information is locally specific according to the regional District Health Board (DHB) contract.

The 'Drugs by Symptom' pages are a practical guide to suggest possible medications for given symptoms.

The suggested books and journals for further reading are a good cross section of those available and would be helpful to gain more in-depth knowledge.

Some of the writing could be improved to enhance clarity. I do have concerns with some aspects of the symptom management section of this book. For instance, the listed use of opioids for terminal sedation confuses the issue. When using opioids for symptom management (e.g. pain) a side effect may be sedation, but with the other three groups of drugs listed the primary intention is to sedate.

The aim of this booklet is to impart easily found helpful symptom management and drug information for a practitioner taking care of a palliative care patient and in this it succeeds.

Review by **Dr Bruce Foggo,** palliative medicine specialist

This is a gorgeous little book, now in its fourth edition since first publication in 2002. A fourth edition in a relatively short space of time testament to its popularity and usefulness and to the commitment of its authors to keep it up to date. It has grown over that time from 114 to 141 pages with expanded drug monograph and symptom management sections, but remains small enough to fit in the pocket of a white coat or sit on a desk as a ready reference.

The handbook is divided into four sections:
- Guidelines for management of symptoms commonly encountered in palliative care
- Drug information—brief monographs of key drugs used in palliative care
- Medicines commonly used in palliative care listed by symptom
- Further reading.

The information in each section is concise, informative and current with an indication when assistance should be sought and which drugs are best initiated or used in a specialist palliative care setting. The individual entries are not referenced, but the reading list is extensive and relevant.

The handbook is recommended as a first point of reference for nurses and doctors who encounter the occasional palliative care patient and for palliative care nurses and doctors as a quick reference and guide to further reading. All Year 5 Auckland medical students get a handbook as part of their palliative care resource pack.

And a bargain at $5 per copy—obtainable from Nurse Maude Hospice, PO Box 36 126, Christchurch.

The book can also be downloaded free from the Goodfellow Unit, The University of Auckland website http://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/soph/centres/goodfellow/_docs/2009_PC_Handbook_Full.pdf