

section 2.6.1: End stage renal failure

General description of disease

There are many causes for renal disease that ends in renal failure. The most common causes are hypertensive nephropathy and diabetes. Some cancers, especially those with pelvic metastases, that cause obstruction of the ureters and unless amenable to stenting (usually time limited) can also cause death from renal failure. Renal failure was ranked fifteenth in Australia as the underlying cause of death in 2003.¹ The elderly are the population group most susceptible to renal failure.

Potential Problems

Patients with any degree of renal failure have difficulty excreting the metabolites of morphine making pain management using morphine very difficult – considering other opioid options such as fentanyl may be safer for these patients. Management of all medications for this patient group requires careful consideration of possible renal toxicity.

Other symptoms that may present in end stage renal failure include:

fatigue	drowsiness
fluid retention	insomnia
metabolic acidosis	neuromuscular irritability
hyperphosphatemia	seizures
pericarditis	nausea and vomiting
parotitis	pruritis
anaemia	hiccoughs

See *Therapeutic Guidelines – Palliative Care* for management of specific symptoms.²

Specific considerations for end stage disease

- the role of dialysis – patients with end stage symptomatic renal disease may be considered for dialysis
- institute meticulous mouth care
- review of role of dietary management
- consider of blood transfusion when related fatigue and other symptoms of anaemia are troublesome
- consider seizure prevention and plan for management should they occur
- review patient requirements for community-based supports
- assess caregiver needs
- discussion regarding patient preferences for end of life care, advance directives and related decision making is facilitated

references

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Incidence and prevalence of chronic diseases, see www.aihw.gov.au

² Therapeutic Guidelines- Palliative Care, Version 2 (2005), Therapeutic Guidelines Ltd, Victoria, Australia.