The Use of Midazolam Hydrochloride Continuous Infusions in Palliative Care

**Question:** What considerations should be taken into account for patients who receive midazolam hydrochloride continuous infusion on an acute care unit?

**Answer:** Midazolam hydrochloride (MDZ) (Versed®) is a short-acting benzodiazepine (BDZ) class medication that can be used in palliative care settings. It is typically used for sedation, anxiolysis, and muscle relaxation. The use of MDZ in an acute care setting requires careful consideration to ensure patient safety and comfort.

**Mechanism of Action and Pharmacokinetics**

MDZ is a short-acting BDZ that is metabolized by the liver and excreted in the urine. The half-life is one to four hours, making it an ideal choice for short-term sedation. It has a rapid onset of action (three to five minutes after IV injection) and is administered in combination with opioids to achieve total sedation.

**Uses of Midazolam in Oncology and Palliative Care**

Continuous infusions of MDZ have two primary uses in oncology and palliative care. First, MDZ is effective in the management of pain associated with significant anxiety. Second, it can be used to provide sedation for patients undergoing procedures such as endoscopy or biopsy.

**Ethical Considerations in the Use of Midazolam for Total Sedation**

In palliative care, the use of total sedation is controversial. Palliative care providers must be aware of the ethical considerations involved in providing total sedation, including the potential for hastening death and the importance of ensuring patient dignity and autonomy.

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