

# Cancer Pain

## Beyond Opioid



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Cancer is often being associated with pain and the use of opioid. Opioid is a class of medication which is very effective for cancer-related pain, particularly pain originating from organs like liver, bone and brain. Opioid can be classified into mild opioids like codeine and tramadol, and more potent opioids like morphine, oxycodone and fentanyl.

For pain arising from nerves, adjunctive medications like pregabalin, gabapentin and amitriptyline are added to further optimise pain control. Meanwhile paracetamol, dexamethasone and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications are used to counter inflammation surrounding the tumour.

Optimal dose titration is crucial to obtain maximal efficacy from the various analgesics, while at the same time minimising any potential unwanted side-effects. Cancer pain scoring and pain ladder are useful tools to estimate the pain severity and guide doctors in choosing the most appropriate analgesics.

Radiotherapy is a very effective treatment modality to palliate painful bone and soft tissue metastases. Modern radiotherapy equipment and treatment technique enable clinical oncologists and radiotherapists to deliver radiation accurately to the tumour and minimise collateral effect to surrounding organs.



Radiotherapy refers to the use of ionising radiation for treatment of cancers, some benign tumours and occasionally certain benign conditions (e.g. keloids, pigmented villonodular synovitis). Radiotherapy is usually given once daily for five days per week. For palliation of painful bone and soft tissue metastases, patients usually require between one and ten sessions of radiation treatments.

Systemic anti-cancer treatment like immunotherapy, molecular targeted therapy, chemotherapy and hormonal therapy help to optimise overall cancer control and prevent pain flare. The revolution in cancer care has seen more personalised cancer treatment targeting individual patient tumour genomic profile.

Oncologists work closely with palliative care doctors and nurses to offer a more holistic cancer treatment approach. Studies have shown this combined approach not only improves patients' quality of life but also enhances their chances of survival.