Ketamine Infusion for Pain

Patient Information

Ketamine has been used in Australia for many years. It was initially used as an anaesthetic agent, helping people go to sleep for an operation and to provide good pain relief during the operation. In recent years it has been used in lower doses for people with chronic pain.

Low dose ketamine provides significant pain relief in most people but without the sedation. It is not an opioid drug like Morphine, and acts on a different part of the nervous system within the spinal cord to help inhibit pain. Ketamine helps to desensitise the spinal nerves, which have become overly sensitive from prolonged episodes of pain. If the nervous system can be made less sensitive or at least returned to a more normal level of sensitivity, there is the possibility that the level of chronic pain will be reduced for weeks and sometimes months.

The temporary relief obtained from low dose Ketamine infusions can also be used to help some people who are trying to come off/cease their opioid analgesic medications. It is often easier to give up these medications under the analgesic cover of the ketamine infusion.

Low dose ketamine infusion can be administered either intravenously (into a vein) or subcutaneously (under the skin) over a period of time to be determined by your treating doctor. A subcutaneous infusion is easier to commence, care for and maintain, but some people are sensitive to the ketamine and have a chemical irritation at the infusion site (usually on the abdominal wall) with the development of a small red lump. The infusion site is then moved every twelve hours, but some patients will still go home from hospital with a number of these small red lumps on their abdominal wall. These lumps take a few weeks to completely disappear.

Too low a dose of ketamine will not help the pain and too high a dose will cause side effects such as confusion, sedation, nausea and hallucinations. There is also a very small risk that ketamine can cause some liver dysfunction. The ketamine infusion is usually commenced at a low dose to avoid side effects, but increased gradually as required to achieve adequate pain relief.

Patients requiring a ketamine infusion are usually admitted to Brisbane Private Hospital where there is a team of doctors and nurses who can provide continuity of care even if your pain specialist is at another hospital on a particular day.

The subcutaneous route of administration is used for simplicity and the infusion continues for approximately five days. Occasionally the ketamine infusion is repeated but not normally within 4 months.

Ketamine Infusion -Patient Consent

- Before admitting to hospital, you must provide us with a current GP referral. The referral must include any allergies, medical history and list of any current medications you are taking.

- You will be booked for a consultation with your treating doctor prior to admitting to hospital. In this consultation you will agree to any goals that need to be achieved whilst having the ketamine infusion.

- Prior to commencing ketamine infusion, you will have blood tests to check your kidney, liver function and electrolytes. If you have any recent results of these tests, please bring a copy.

- Please confirm that you have read the information sheet and acknowledged the side effects.

During your admission:

a) For you own safety, you are not allowed to leave the ward during your admission otherwise your treating doctor may have to discharge you early
b) As ketamine can impact your cognitive function, we will not initiate any new investigations or pain therapies during this admission
c) If you are continuing ketamine infusion as a regular pain management therapy, as per your pain specialist (4-6 months interval), it is a requirement to get assessed by a pain physiotherapist and pain psychologist annually.

I have read and understood my rights and responsibilities for the above criteria and agree to comply comply with the above.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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