Patient-Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

What is PCA?
PCA stands for patient controlled analgesia. Analgesia means relief of pain. With PCA, you can give your own medicine and get pain control without injections.

How does PCA work?
A small pump with a supply of pain medicine ordered by your doctor is placed by your bed and attached to your IV (intravenous) line. The pump is set so that when you push the control button, a small amount of medicine goes into your blood stream for quick pain relief. You can give yourself these small, controlled doses several times an hour, if needed.

The PCA should only be used by you. Family, friends or medical staff should not push the button for you.

Is it possible to get an overdose?
If the pump is used correctly, you will not get an overdose. The pump is set for a specific amount of medicine at a specific time. To use the pump correctly, no one but you should push the button. The pump limits how much pain medicine you can receive. Only you can tell when your pain is relieved. If you push the button too often, the pump

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will not deliver any medicine unless the set amount of time has passed. If you do not push the button, you will not get any medicine. The total amount of medicine you can give yourself is safely limited. If you feel very sleepy, wait a while before pushing the button again. Also, if you do not get relief from pain, tell your nurse.

No one else should ever push the button for you. The key to making the PCA work safely and correctly is that the only person who pushes the button is you. It can be dangerous for other persons, even loving family or friends, to push the button.

**How much medicine should I take?**

Take enough medicine to be comfortable. You may not be completely free of pain, but this method of pain control should help you eat, sleep and move around in comfort. Your recovery time will be shorter if you move around. The pain medicine may make you feel sleepy. If you become very sleepy and still have a lot of pain, tell your nurse.

**Are there other side effects?**

A few people have some nausea, slower breathing, or itching from their pain medicine. Your nurse will check you often to see if you are comfortable and whether you are having any problems.

**What should I do if I have a lot of pain?**

First, if you are not sleepy, push the button more often. Check with your nurse to see if you are getting the correct amount of medicine. Your nurse also will check the IV line and the pump to be sure it is working. If changes in your medicine are needed, the nurse will call your doctor.

**Could PCA cause addiction?**

People who take medicine to relieve physical pain are not likely to become addicted to the medicine. Research has shown that patients who give themselves small frequent doses of pain medicine according to their own needs, often need less than people who are given pain shots. As
your condition improves and your pain becomes less, you can switch to medicines by mouth. The peace of mind you gain from knowing you can control your pain yourself adds to your comfort.

- Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.