



First Responder Accreditation

Topic 13:

Pharmacology

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Introduction

The overarching aim of administering drugs to our patients is to do it safely, effectively and to closely observe your patient for desirable and undesirable effects. The administration of drugs must be undertaken in accordance with St John Ambulance Australia policy and within the regulations set down by State and Territory governments.

St John Ambulance Australia is a national organisation, existing in all States and Territories. Each State and Territory has their own set of laws and regulations that govern what drugs may be purchased, administered and stored. In the interests of cross-border capability, this module will provide you with sufficient knowledge and competence to safely and effectively intervene with a standardised list of drugs.

Dependent upon the applicable laws in your State or Territory, you may not be able to administer all drugs on a routine basis. Your State or Territory Office will provide you with more guidance on this matter.

What is a drug?

For the purposes of this module, a drug is a substance that causes a physiological effect or change when introduced or administered into the human body. All drugs have the potential to cause undesirable effects or harm to patients.

Consent

Patient consent is required prior to administering them any drug. Parental or guardian consent is required when administering a drug to a patient under the age of 18.

Administration of a drug

Prior to the administration of any drug to any patient, a series of assessments and safety checks must occur. These assessments and safety checks are intended to safely guide and prompt you through the administration process ensure an optimal outcome for patient. When assessing a patient who may require a drug, it is important to consider the 'big picture' and not become solely focused on the administration component of the clinical care being provided.

The following must be checked before administering any drug:

- Contraindications
- Allergies
- Expiry date
- Packaging

Adherence to procedures

The drug-related information provided in this module is the insured position of St John Ambulance Australia and reflective of that contained in the *First Aid Services Medication Procedures*. First Responders, when administering drugs, are reminded of this and the requirement to adhere to the procedures and other State or Territory policies and standard operating procedures at all times.

The most current version of the *First Aid Services Medication Procedures* can be found in the member connect website: <http://members.stjohn.org.au>.

The '5 rights' of administration

Drugs may only be administered to patient once you have satisfied or answered the '5 rights'.

1. Right drug *Is this the right drug to administer to this patient?*
You may only administer drugs as clinically indicated. This is also referred to as 'indicators for use'.
2. Right patient *Does this patient require this drug?*
Determining the right drug is achieved by having an understanding of the content of this module and conducting a thorough assessment of your patient. This should include and not be limited to presenting problem, medical history, co-morbidities, allergies and whether or not the patient is currently taking prescribed or other drugs or substances.
3. Right dose *Is this the right dose?*
All drugs are clearly labelled with their dose. In the case of drugs available to you, this may be in the form of milligram (mg), millilitre (ml), microgram (mcg) or gram (gm).
4. Right time *When was the last dose of this drug taken or administered?*
Some drugs, when administered too frequently may cause undesired side effects or compromise the condition of a patient. Dependent upon the drug, this may result in drug toxicity – a serious medical condition. You must assess and determine whether a patient about to receive a drug has had it before, and if so, when and what was the dose?

The answers to these questions will determine whether or not you should administer a drug or re-assess their clinical care.
5. Right route *What is the correct or appropriate route to administer this drug?*
Drugs can be administered via a variety of routes. Common routes include orally, inhalation, intramuscular, intravenous and sub-lingual. Prior to administering a drug to patient, you must ensure it is delivered via the right route. This is also known as the 'method of administration'.

For further information on specific medication please refer to First Aid Services Medication Procedures found on the member connect website. <http://members.stjohn.org.au>.