Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

What is PCA?
PCA is Patient-Controlled Analgesia. The PCA machine gives you control over managing your pain. When you need pain medicine, you just push the PCA button. When you push the PCA button, the PCA machine gives you the pain medicine the doctor has ordered for you.

Who will press the PCA button?
Only the patient can press the PCA button. No one else, including staff or family members should ever press the PCA button.

When will PCA therapy be started?
The PCA machine will be connected to your intravenous after your surgery.

What if I start to feel sleepy?
The pain medicine can make many people feel sleepy, especially when you first start to get a pain medicine that you have never had or have not had in a long time. Try to balance the pain relief against any sleepiness you may feel.

Do I need to stay in bed when using the PCA?
No, you are encouraged to move around with the PCA. The PCA machine is attached to an intravenous pole. The PCA runs on battery when unplugged. However, the PCA machine cannot be taken out of the hospital for any reason. You cannot take the PCA outside of the hospital to have a cigarette, to get fresh air or to meet with friends.

How long will I be using the PCA?
Most patients use the PCA for a few days after surgery. Everyone wants you to be as comfortable as quickly and safely as possible so you can feel more like yourself again.
How much medicine will I get?
Your Acute Pain doctor and nurse will make sure the PCA is set to give you the right dose. If you start to feel some pain, especially when you cough or move around, just push and release the button. The medication starts working very quickly...usually within five minutes...so give it a little time “to work”.

When and how often should I push the button?
When you start to feel uncomfortable and need medicine, press the PCA button. The doctor from the Acute Pain Service has ordered the PCA machine to be programmed to give you pain medicine in a dose that is safe for you. You should notice that your pain has improved after about 5 minutes. If you do not feel an improvement after five minutes, you can press the PCA button again. You may need to push the PCA button every five to ten minutes, three or four times in order to help your pain. If you do not feel that your pain is getting better even after several pushes of the PCA button, tell your nurse. Your nurse can discuss ways to improve your pain with a member of the Acute Pain Service.

If you are comfortable and your pain has eased off you can wait to push the PCA button until you start to feel uncomfortable again.

What can I expect?
The PCA, like other types of pain management, may not take away all your pain. You may still feel some mild pain or soreness. Your pain should be managed so you can deep breathe, cough and move around.

When you are in hospital we want you to tell us about your pain. You will be asked to rate your pain using a scale from 0 -10. We will ask "if 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain ever", what number would you rate your pain? We need to know about your pain at rest (when you are not moving) and also when you are moving around.

Can I give myself medication by mistake?
No, the PCA is programmed to give you pain medicine every five minutes only when you press the button. You have to push the button with your thumb or finger and release it to give yourself any pain medicine. Rolling over on it when you are asleep will not make the PCA work.

The PCA will make a "beep" sound when you are getting a dose. If you press the button when the pain medicine is not yet available, the PCA will make a "beep-beep-beep" sound.
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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years.