



Issue: Drugs for General Anaesthesia

Raised by: Jo Wright (Chief Rural Medical Practitioner); RANs in various TE Health Centres.

Background: Proposal that health centres routinely stock the injectable medicines required for induction of anaesthesia, to facilitate intubation. A small number of Remote health centres have held general anaesthetic drugs previously.

The advent of the Remote Health [Standard Drug List](#), which does not currently include induction and paralysing agents, has prompted review of whether to hold these medicines at all remote health centres.

Discussion: This discussion involves the potential stocking of medicines in remote health centres, used for induction and maintenance of general anaesthesia. It is distinct from discussions on endotracheal intubation to establish an airway in already unconscious patients in remote settings.

In general, medical retrieval teams, using their own equipment and medicines, carry out induction of anaesthesia and intubation where a critically unwell client requires this in the remote context. However, there are occasions where an urgent general anaesthetic may be indicated in the management of a critically ill client while awaiting the arrival of the medical retrieval team. The safe administration of a general anaesthetic requires specific medicines, access to relevant emergency equipment and adequately trained clinicians. The use of general anaesthetic agents is not covered by PADDA Section 29 notices nor DHF endorsed clinical protocols, and therefore is limited to medical officer initiation.

In most remote sites, there are limited occasions where suitably qualified clinicians are present to safely perform controlled induction of anaesthesia. It remains unreasonable therefore, to routinely hold stock in all health centres, given the cost, refrigeration, and stock expiry issues. A number of sites, however, have resident medical staff, and a greater capacity to manage intubated clients; in these places there may be justification to propose the holding of the relevant medicines.

For a health centre to routinely stock anaesthetic drugs the following criteria is to be considered:

- a resident GP, where the GP has competency and recency of practice in ET intubation
- capacity to manage an artificial airway by *manual +/- mechanical ventilation* for extended periods
- the value of having on-site ability to monitor blood gases (i-STAT)

The process for a health centre to hold anaesthetic drugs is through submission of a [Non Standard Medicine - Local Addition](#) form with approval by the SRMP-Operations.

Consultation: Remote Health Pharmacy Group

References: Australian Medicines Handbook, [Chapter 2 – Anaesthetics](#)

Outcome: Medicines for general anaesthesia are **NOT** included on the [Standard Drug List](#).

Individual health centres may consider their suitability to hold anaesthetic drugs. Submission of a [Non Standard Medicine - Local Addition](#) request will be approved against the above criteria and any other relevant location specific considerations.