What is

PAINLESS CONTROLLED

Analgesia?

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

Patient controlled analgesia (PCA) is a type of pain relief that lets you give yourself small amounts of opioid painkiller into your vein as and when you need it. You are able to do this by pressing a button attached to a pump with the painkiller in it. This is a common way we deal with pain after an operation.

There are many benefits to using this type of pain relief:

- You can press the button to get some painkiller as soon as you feel or expect to feel pain. You do not have to call the nurse and wait for the painkillers to be prepared.
- The amount of pain felt after an operation varies a lot from one person to another therefore PCA allows you to give the right amount of painkiller for you.
- Using PCA avoids repeated injections of painkillers as the drug is delivered straight into your bloodstream via the ‘drip’.
- Some people feel much less anxious when they have some control over a situation. With PCA, you will have greater control over your pain relief.

This leaflet aims to increase your awareness of how your pain might be managed with PCA.
The amount of time for which you will need PCA will vary depending on the type of surgery you have had, how quickly you are recovering and how much discomfort you have. You must be able to drink when the PCA is stopped so that it may be replaced with painkilling tablets. It is recommended that you take regular tablets for at least a few days.

PCA is known to be an extremely safe method of pain relief and you will be closely monitored by nursing staff whilst using it. Its safety however relies on the fact that only you are allowed to press the button, making it virtually impossible to overdose. Please do not allow any visitors to use the PCA for you.

**Some of your questions answered about PCA . . .**

**How do I give myself the painkiller?**

The nurse in the Recovery Room after your operation will set up the PCA machine and the control button given to you. When you need painkillers, simply press the button once and release it. A pre-set dose of painkiller will be delivered by the machine straight into your bloodstream and you should feel some relief within about 5 minutes.

**When do I press the button?**

When you are resting in bed after your operation you can press the button, which has a green light on it, as soon as the level of pain begins to increase. Do not wait until your pain is severe as the painkiller may not work.

If you need to move, for example, sit up, turn over or get out of bed, always press your button at least 5 minutes before doing so to get the maximum amount of relief. It is also advisable, if possible, to press the button a few minutes before any deep breathing, coughing or nursing procedure that may be uncomfortable.

Once you have pressed the button the green light will flash while the painkiller is being delivered into your bloodstream, the light will then go off. The light will remain off for 5 minutes. During this time even if you press the button no painkiller will be delivered. This is a safety lockout. After 5 minutes the green light will come back on and a dose of painkiller will be available again when you press the button.

**Will the painkiller run out if I use too much?**

Do not worry about how much painkiller you are using. All the PCA machines are refillable and the nurse will do this as soon as it is required.
What should I do if the painkiller fails to work?

After pressing the button once, wait a few minutes to see whether the painkiller has worked. If you are now comfortable, do not press the button again unless the pain begins to increase or if you need to move. If you are still in pain, press the button again when the green light shows and wait a few minutes to give the painkiller a chance to work.

Finally . . .

We hope you found this information leaflet useful. If you have any questions or concerns about your pain control or the PCA procedure, please ask your nurse.