**SHORTNESS OF BREATH**

**What leads to…?**

* Disease e.g.
  + Tumour infiltration
  + SVCO
  + Pleural effusion
  + Lymphangitis
  + Abdominal distension
  + Heart failure
  + COPD
  + Interstitial lung disease
  + Cystic fibrosis
  + MND
* Debility e.g.
  + PTE
  + Respiratory secretions
* Incidental e.g.
  + Chest infection
  + Asthma
  + Anaemia
  + Arrhythmia
  + Anxiety / fear / panic

**What do you need to know?**

* Pattern of breathlessness
  + When
  + Precipitating factors
  + Alleviating factors
  + Associated features e.g. fever / sputum
* Oxygen saturation
* Overall condition and place on disease trajectory

**What can you do?**

* Remember that SOB is both frightening & difficult to treat
* Recognise / treat crises e.g. PTE, SVCO
* Recognise and explore anxiety / fear associated with breathlessness / disease / situation
* Relaxation
* Physiotherapy
* Avoid!
* Fan
* Open window

**What about drug treatments?**

* Treat the treatable e.g.
  + Chest infection
  + Bronchospasm
  + Cardiac decompensation
  + Pleural effusion
* Relieve anxiety
  + Benzodiazepine e.g. lorazepam S/L
* Treat breathlessness
  + Bronchodilators
  + Steroids e.g. trial of dexamethasone
  + Opioids (low dose)
* Treat respiratory secretions
* Oxygen (if low oxygen levels)
* Nebulised saline 0.9%
* Possible sedation in last stages of life

**Resources**

* NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Palliative Care Website <http://www.palliativecareggc.org.uk>
* MacMillan Cancer Support (Cancerbackup resources) <http://macmillan.org.uk>
* Roy Castle Lung Foundation <http://roycastle.org>
* Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland <http://chss.org.uk/>
* British Lung Foundation Breathe easy Support Network <http://www.lunguk.org/>
* Scottish Palliative Care Guidelines <http://www.palliativecareguidelines.scot.nhs.uk/>