Lactulose for constipation SESLHDPR/457

POLICY STATEMENT

The Registered Nurse (RN) / Registered Midwife (RM) is authorised to instigate nurse/midwife-initiated medication without an authorised prescriber's order under the specific circumstances set out in the **INDICATIONS** section and provided there are no contraindications present.

It is important for nursing and midwifery staff to remain aware that:

- Minor ailments may be symptoms of other more serious diseases or may be adverse reactions to medication already prescribed
- Nurse-initiated medication may interact with the patient's prescribed medication
- The maximum daily recommended dose of the medication must not be exceeded.[1]

The administering nurse/midwife must record the administration on an approved paper or electronic medication chart, clearly indicating that the medicine was nurse initiated.

If the patient continues to require the medication (i.e., more than two doses in 24 hours) then a medical officer (MO) must be consulted and a regular or PRN order obtained.

A change in the patient's condition such as newly occurring or increasing severity of symptoms must be reported to the MO and investigated.

INDICATIONS

Management of treatable constipation (including opioid induced)

CONTRAINDICATIONS

Hypersensitivity to the active substance or to any of the excipients.
Galactosaemia - galactose or lactose restricted diet
Intestinal obstruction.
Clinical dehydration

PRECAUTIONS

Safe to use in pregnancy or breastfeeding

HISTORY/ASSESSMENT

- Assess patient's usual bowel habits (frequency of stools, volume, colour, consistency)
- Patient's current bowel status (last time bowel opened)
- Assess for alterations in bowel patterns
- Refer to medical officer if patient has the following symptoms: blood in stools, weight loss, abdominal pain
- Assess patient for faecal impaction.
- Review patient's current medication for medicines which may cause constipation
- Consider risk of fluid overload

Lactulose for constipation SESLHDPR/457

PROTOCOL/ADMINISTRATION GUIDELINES

Caution: CHECK for allergies and/or contraindications

Drug	Dose[4]	Route	Frequency
Lactulose	***1 to 6 years*: 5 to 10 mL**	Oral	Once
	***7 to 12 years*: 15 mL**		
	***Over 12 years*: 15 to 45 mL**		
Give with fluid such as fruit juice, water, or milk			

MONITORING - POTENTIAL ADVERSE EFFECTS/INTERACTIONS

Monitor bowel function and complete stool chart
Common adverse effects: flatulence, abdominal discomfort, cramps
Infrequent adverse effects: diarrhoea, electrolyte imbalance (prolonged use), nausea, vomiting.

DOCUMENTATION

A record of the administration must be made on the approved paper or electronic medication chart noting that the medication was nurse initiated.

A further record of the medication administered including indication, dose and effect must be included in the patient's health care record.

PRACTICE POINTS

- Onset of action is 1 to 3 days.
- Ensure adequate fluid intake
- Ensure adequate dietary fibre intake.
- Encourage mobility, where possible.
- Consider review by dietician, if appropriate.
- Refer for medication review if constipation may be medication induced

REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

1. NSW Health Policy Directive Medication Handling PD2022_032
2. Australian Medicines Handbook. Lactulose. South Australia: Australian Medicines Handbook Pty Ltd, January 2025.
3. MIMs Online. Actliax. 01 June 2023.
4. eTG complete. Functional constipation in adults. Melbourne: Therapeutic Guidelines Ltd. August 2022.

REVISION and APPROVAL HISTORY

Date	Version Number	Author and Approval
July 2015	DRAFT	Pharmacy Department, Prince of Wales Hospital
September 2015	1	Approved by SESLHD Drug & QUM Committee
May 2018	DRAFT 2	Reviewed by nursing and pharmacy staff. Minor wording updates made. Doses updated to recommended initial doses. References updated.
July 2018	2	Approved by SESLHD Quality Use of Medicines Committee
September 2021	DRAFT 3	Reviewed by nursing and pharmacy staff. Minor wording updates
October 2021	3	Approved by SESLHD Quality Use of Medicines Committee
June 2023	DRAFT 4	NSW Medicines Formulary reviewed. Reviewed by nursing and pharmacy staff.
September 2023	4	Approved by SESLHD Drug and Therapeutics Committee
August 2025	5	Approved by SESLHD Drug and Therapeutics Committee