

Table 6-4: Treatment of Potentially Reversible Causes of Dyspnea

Cause of Dyspnea	Physical Signs	Treatment Options	Route
Bronchospasm	Wheezing Decreased air movement Nonproductive cough	Bronchodilators – adrenergic and anticholinergic Corticosteroids	Inhaled Inhaled, IV, PO, SC, PR
Congestive Heart Failure	Inspiratory rales Edema Elevated JVP Orthopnea	Diuretics Cardiac medications Morphine Oxygen	PO, IV, IM PO, IV PO, SC, IV, PR Inhaled
Bacterial Pneumonia	Productive cough with changing sputum Localized rales or consolidation Fever, chills	Antibiotics Expectorants Cautious hydration Morphine for pain/dyspnea Oxygen	PO, IV, IM PO PO, IV, SC PO, IV, SC, PR Inhaled
Pneumocystis carinii	Nonproductive cough Hypoxemia, pain, dyspnea	Antibiotics Corticosteroids	PO, IV PO, IV, SC, PR
Tuberculosis	Fever, cough	Antibacterial drugs	PO, IV
Pleural Effusions	Dullness and decreased air movement in lower lung field with radiographic or ultrasound confirmation	Thoracentesis Pleurodesis (early) if malignant etiology Pleuroperitoneal shunt	
Extrinsic airway compression	Stridor – especially inspiratory Severe shortness of breath Risk factors, such as neck or mediastinal malignancy	External radiation Airway stent Corticosteroids Benzodiazepines Opioids Barbiturates for anxiety or sedation (see text)	PO, IV, SC, PR PO, IV, SC, PR PO, IV, SC, PR PO, IV, IM, PR

Table 6-4: Treatment of Potentially Reversible Causes of Dyspnea (continued)

Cause of Dyspnea	Physical Signs	Treatment Options	Route
Intrinsic airway obstruction	Worsening dyspnea Distal absent breath sounds or localized wheezing Risk factors, like scarring, bronchogenic cancer	Bronchoscopic laser treatment Internal radioisotope application Airway stent	
Copious airway secretions	Diffuse rhonchi, especially over upper airways Ineffective or absent cough	Anticholinergic drugs Antihistamines Dehydration	PO, SC, IV PO, IM, PR
Pulmonary embolism	Sudden onset of dyspnea Risk factors for venous thrombosis	Anticoagulation - heparin Low molecular weight heparin Warfarin	IV, SC SC PO