

## Palliative care Emergencies

### Guideline: Superior Vena Caval Obstruction

#### Introduction

Superior vena caval obstruction (SVCO) is caused by tumour in the mediastinum preventing venous drainage from the head, arms and upper trunk. This usually occurs over weeks or months, but occasionally the obstruction occurs rapidly over days and needs urgent treatment.

Consider SVCO in the context of known disease (bronchial cancer) if there is:

- Oedema of face or arms / hands
- Distended neck or arm veins
- Headaches (worse on stooping)
- Dusky colour to skin in chest, arms and face
- Dyspnoea
- Suffused injected conjunctivae

#### Management

Dexamethasone 8 -16 mg daily is usually commenced and gradually reduced as symptoms allow.

Radiotherapy should also be considered.

Alternatively, a stent can be inserted into the superior vena cava.

**If these symptoms present as features of yet unknown / undiagnosed disease then seek urgent medical assessment.**