PURPOSE:
Topical medications introduce medication through the skin, by absorption.

CONSIDERATIONS:
1. Topical medications include transdermal systems, pastes, aerosol sprays, ointments, lotions and creams.
2. Topical medications are used primarily for localized effect, though some medications, i.e., nitroglycerine, Fentanyl, and scopolamine, have a systemic effect in transdermal systems.
3. Topical medications are difficult to deliver in precise doses.
4. It is not necessary to apply large amounts of topical medication and ointment to skin, as it may be irritating to skin, stain clothes and be unnecessarily expensive.
5. Plastic film or transparent dressing may be used to cover some topical medications, i.e., cortisone ointment to increase absorption and protect clothing. Plastic film is not to be used with all topical medications. Follow manufacturer’s recommendations.
6. Transdermal systems or “patches” can be placed on any area of skin except below elbows and knees.
7. Consult package insert for rate of absorption, side effects, duration, etc., e.g., Fentanyl patches take up to 72 hours to reach maximum effect. Fentanyl patches should be disposed of by folding the adhesive side of the patch together so that it sticks to itself.
8. Always clean the skin with soap and water or debride the tissue of old medication and encrustation before applying new medication.
9. When applying the next dose, apply to different skin site, rotate the area of application to avoid skin irritation
10. Instructions given to patient/caregiver.
11 Use at least 2 patient identifiers prior to administering medications.

EQUIPMENT:
Topical medication
Plastic wrap and tape (optional)
Gloves
Tongue depressor (optional)
Soap
Water

PROCEDURE:
1. Adhere to Standard Precautions.
2. Identify patient and explain procedure.
3. Verify medication usage and instructions.
4. Wash off old topical medication with soap and water and dry area thoroughly.
5. Expose skin area where topical ointment or patch is to be applied. Provide patient privacy. Wash with soap and water, dry area thoroughly.
6. Apply topical medication using gloves, if necessary per manufacturer’s directions.
7. Apply plastic film or transparent dressing, if indicated by medication manufacturer’s instructions.
8. Discard soiled supplies in appropriate containers.

AFTER CARE:
1. Document in patient’s record:
   a. Medication administered, dose, time, route and site.
   b. Patient's response to procedure, side effects and management.
   c. Instructions given to patient/caregiver.
   d. Communication with the physician.