

Association for Palliative Medicine Position Statement

APM position on the double effect (DE)

1. The Association for Palliative Medicine is an organisation of over 1000 specialist palliative care doctors working in hospices, hospitals and the community.
2. The Double Effect (sometimes called a rule, principle or doctrine) states that *“The risk of a potential, known (foreseen), unintended consequence or side-effect of treatment is justified only if all the following criteria are met:*
 - *The intended effect is good in itself*
 - *The clinician’s intention is solely to produce the good effect*
 - *The intervention is proportionate to the situation*
 - *The good effect is not achieved through the bad effect”*
3. There is a misconception that morphine related drugs and sedative drugs bring about death more quickly and that doctors both know this and in some way condone their use with the double effect.
4. The APM refutes this claim: it knows of no credible research evidence to suggest that a patient’s life is shortened either by opioids or sedatives when used in line with accepted palliative care practice¹
5. The APM believes that DE is unnecessary to justify the use or dosing regimes necessary to manage pain or distress in all but the most exceptional circumstances.
6. Professionals who are concerned they are shortening life by use of these medications should contact their local specialist palliative care services.

Further reading:

1. George R, Regnard C. Lethal drugs or dangerous prescribers? Palliative Medicine 2007;21:1-4.

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