

Association for Palliative Medicine Position Statement

APM position on using sedating medication at the end of life

1. The Association for Palliative Medicine is an organisation of over 1000 specialist palliative care doctors working in hospices, hospitals and the community.
2. All medication used in palliative care, including sedative medication, is aimed at the relief of specific symptoms.
3. Medication which is sedating in its effect should only be used if the symptom cannot be relieved with more specific interventions.
4. Rarely, patients may experience distress when symptoms cannot be controlled even after exhaustive attempts with specific interventions. In these circumstances some patients may require sedating medication to diminish awareness of their suffering.
5. If medication is sedating in its effect, the dose should be monitored in order to ensure that it is the minimum required to relieve the patient's distress. Medication used in this way does not shorten life.
6. Sedation in palliative care is thus sedation while the patient dies and is not sedating the patient to death.
7. Morphine and related drugs are vital painkillers but are wholly unsuitable for use as sedation.

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