Palliative sedation at the end of life

When is it performed?

Palliative sedation is offered at the end of life, when there is intolerable suffering due to symptoms and/or severe distress that are not otherwise sufficiently relieved.



What is it?

The level of consciousness of the patient is reduced in order to relieve intolerable suffering. Midazolam is an example of medicine that is used.



Team approach

It should only be started after consultation with a team with specialist expertise in palliative sedation. For complex patients, this team can advise the treating team and help with follow-up.







Suffocation, dyspnoea



Anticipation and aftercare

In advanced disease, at regular intervals, it is good practice to find out patients' care preferences and talk with relatives regarding treatment and palliative sedation. In addition, the death of a loved one can cause a lot of grief and aftercare is therefore important.



How is it evaluated?

Once sedated, the wellbeing of the patient is assessed by indicative signs of comfort and consulting with relatives.

Breathing
Slow and silent

Voice

No negative vocalizations

Body Relaxed

Proportionality

Palliative sedation has to be proportional to the relief of intolerable suffering required in each patient.

It can be:

- Light / Deep
- Intermittent / Continuous

Palliative Sedation practice

This medical practice does not intend to shorten life: death happens naturally. Palliative sedation relieves patient's intolerable suffering at the end of life, which is a common concern.

Sedation

Comfort

Information: Review of the scientific literature on palliative sedation, its clinical aspects and how to evaluate its effect. Articles published in: J Pain Symptom Manage 2021; 61 (4):831-844.e10 and Palliative Medicine 2021; 35 (2):295-314. Authors: ATLANTES research team, University of Navarra. European research group PalliativeSedation.

Infographic: Fundamentium. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement № 825700.