

The UNBIASED study

Therapeutic (or palliative) sedation in the context of palliative medicine is the use of medications intended to induce a state of decreased or absent awareness (unconsciousness) in order to relieve the burden of otherwise intractable suffering¹ (Cherny et al, 2009). Surveys of medical decisions at the end of life raise questions about the use of sedation until death, and there are concerns about the use, intentions, risks and significance of the practice in palliative care delivery. There are also questions about how to explain international variation in the use of the practice. The UNBIASED study (**UK – Netherlands - Belgium International SEDation study**) is a collaboration between research teams in UK, Belgium and the Netherlands. We have funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (UK), Research Foundation Flanders (BE), the Flemish Cancer Association (BE), the Special Research Funds of the University of Ghent (BE), Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NL) and the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (NL) to conduct an in depth study of the use of this practice at the bedside in the three countries. The aim of the study is to explore decision-making surrounding the application of therapeutic (or palliative) sedation in contemporary clinical practice, experiences of clinical staff and decedents' companions of its use and their perceptions of its contribution to the management of death. Furthermore, in-depth ethical and philosophical analyses of this practice will be conducted. We will use qualitative methods to develop 30 case studies in each country. These will involve interviews with staff and relatives closely involved in the care of cancer patients who received continuous sedation at home, in hospital or in expert palliative care sites.

1. Cherny N, Radbruch L, The Board of the European Association for Palliative Care (2009) European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC) recommended framework for the use of sedation in palliative care. *Palliative Medicine*, 23(7) 581–593

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