



## **Position statement on the use of sedating drugs at the end of life**

Ethical dilemmas create tension within professional teams and misperceptions amongst the public. As an organisation, Trinity Hospice and Palliative Care Services has, therefore, decided to make clear position statements on a number of common, challenging ethical dilemmas including using sedating drugs at the end of life. These are intended to work as a succinct guide on the issue for members of staff and users of our service.

This statement takes into account opinions expressed by staff, the current law as well as predictions of the impact of the statement on patient care across the family of services that make up Trinity Hospice and Palliative Care Services.

### **Statement**

Medication which is sedating in its effect will only be used within the family of services of Trinity Hospice and Palliative Care Services to treat symptoms of agitation, restlessness and distress alongside more specific interventions and/or medication that address the cause of such as pain relief.

If sedating medication is used, it will be given at an appropriate dose tailored to the individual's needs in relation to the severity of their symptoms. As an organisation, Trinity Hospice and Palliative Care Services believes that sedating medication used in this limited and controlled way does not shorten life.

### **Background**

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.

All medication used for symptom control across the organisation, including the use of sedative medication, is aimed at the relief of specific symptoms.

Sedation used across the family of services of Trinity Hospice and Palliative Care Services in this way is sedation while the patient dies and not sedating the patient to death.

Morphine and related pain killing drugs are wholly unsuitable for use as sedation and will not be used for this purpose within any part of the family of services that make up Trinity Hospice and Palliative Care Services.

### **Susan Salt**

#### **Medical Director**

Written September 2009

Reviewed September 2010

Reviewed September 2011

Review October 2012