

Continuous Palliative Sedation in Terminal Cancer

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Background

- Continuous palliative sedation (CPS) is used for refractory symptoms at the end of life.
- CPS is sometimes seen as a controversial option.
- There is misconception between euthanasia and continuous palliative sedation.

Objective

- To describe the use of continuous palliative sedation in terminal cancer.

Methods

- The 1746 patients medical charts admitted to a terminal cancer care hospice (Maison Michel-Sarrazin, Québec, Canada) over 7 years (2005-2012) were reviewed to retrieve CPS cases.
- Indications, medications, multidisciplinary team consensus and family agreement were analysed.

Results

- 91 patients (5%) received a continuous palliative sedation.
- 40 patients (44%) required a dose adjustment because of agitation.
- 81 patients (91%) showed no sign of agitation at the time of death.
- Multidisciplinary team consensus was obtained in 100% of CPS.
- Family agreement was obtained in 98.6%.

Table 1. Socio-demographic data of patients who received CPS and patients who did not received CPS at admission

CHARACTERISTIC	NO CPS PATIENTS (N=1655)	CPS PATIENTS (N = 91)	P
Age at admission (year)	69.5 (±SD=11,9)	62.5 (±SD=11,6)	<0.001
Gender (% of female)	891 (54.0%)	53 (58.0%)	NS
Mean stay (days)	19.6 (±SD=26,3)	20.9 (±SD=20,0)	NS
Primary tumor site (%)			
Trachea, bronchus, lungs	483 (29.2%)	40 (44%)	0.003
Digestive tract	294 (17.8%)	8 (8.8%)	0.03
Colon & rectum	253 (15.3%)	5 (5.5%)	0.01
Genital and urinary tract	181 (10.9%)	10 (11.0%)	NS
Breast	124 (7.5%)	6 (6.6%)	NS
Lymphoma	76 (4.6%)	3 (3.3%)	NS
Brain	68 (4.1%)	5 (5.5%)	NS
Prostate	51 (3.1%)	1 (1.1%)	NS
Others, unknown or not specified	125 (7.6%)	13 (14.3%)	0.02

Table 2. Mean doses administrated for CPS

MEDICATION	MEAN DAILY DOSE	MEDIAN DAILY DOSE	STD DEVIATION
Opioids*	247.2	117.5	501.9
Benzodiazepines*	17.7	15.0	14.9
Antipsychotics*	4.7	3.9	3.8
Scopolamine	3.7	3.8	2.4

*Benzodiazepines, opioids, and antipsychotics doses were converted into equivalent units (oral lorazepam, subcutaneous morphine and oral haloperidol).

Figure 1. Distribution of CPS duration (mean = 40.7 hours, median = 24.4 hours STD = 53.7 hours)

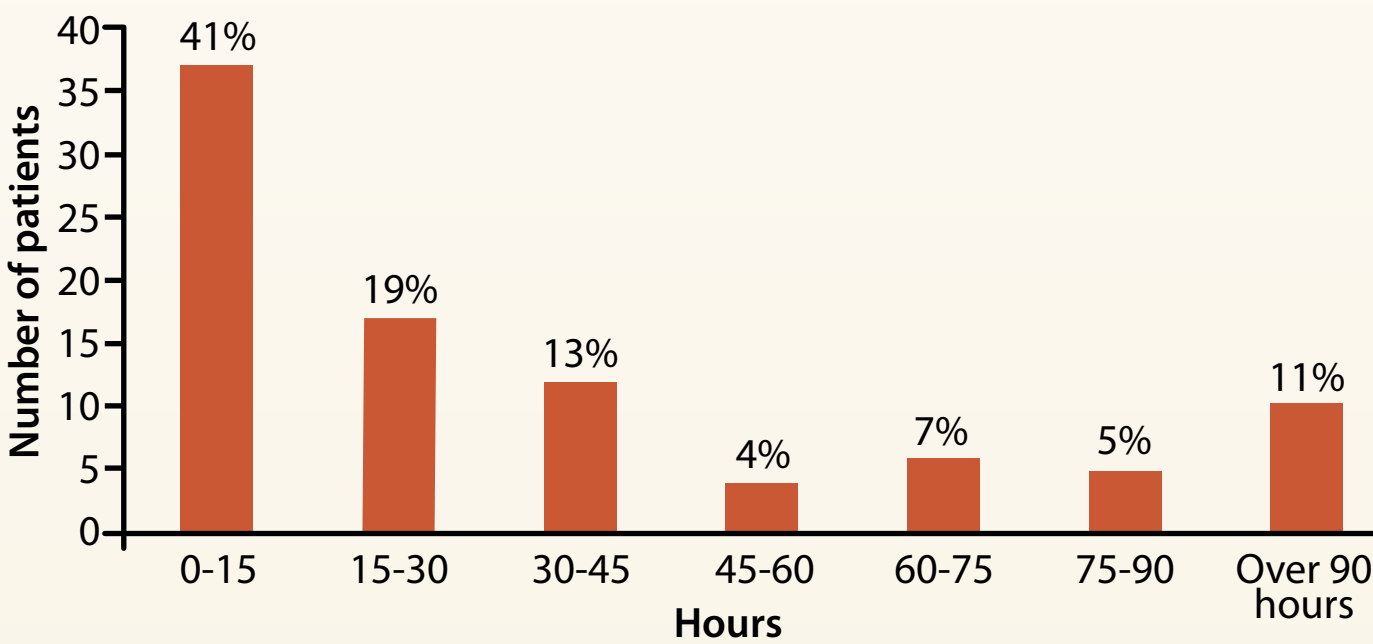


Figure 2. Indications for CPS administration

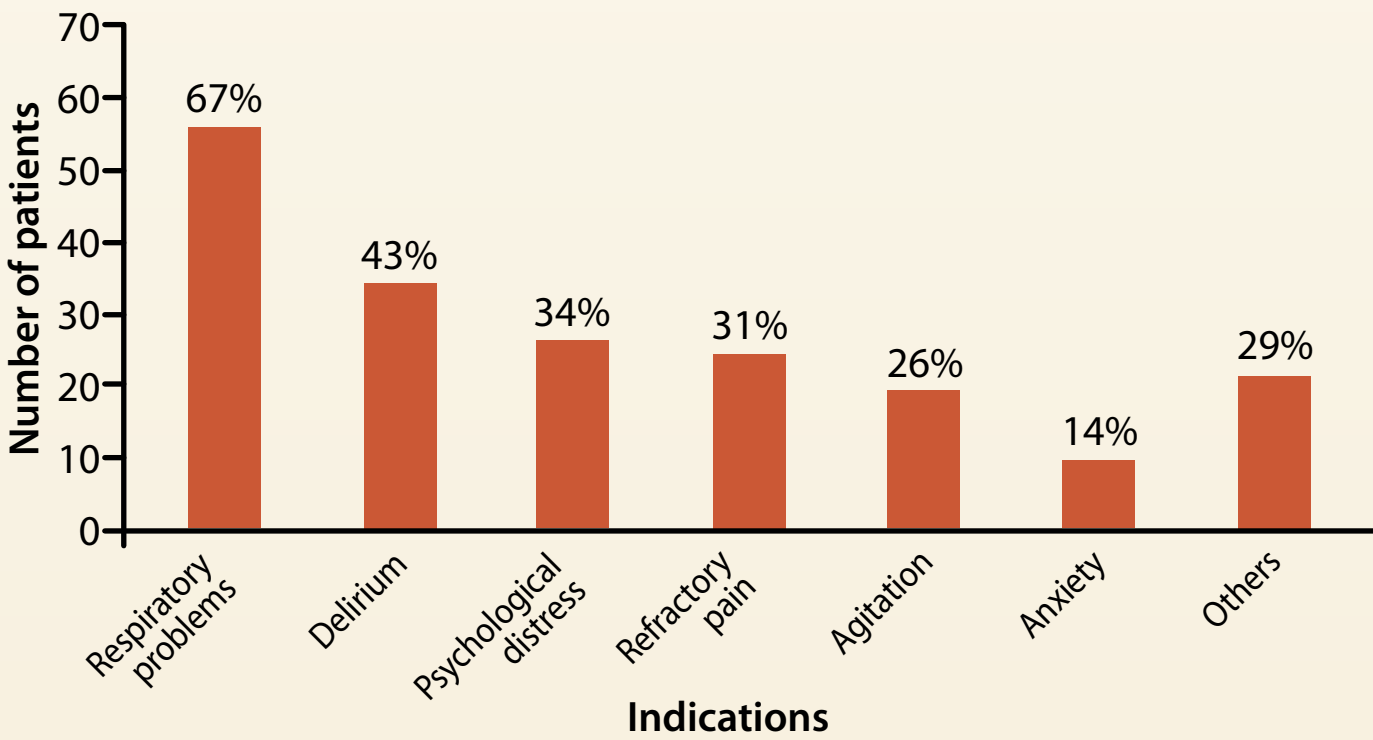
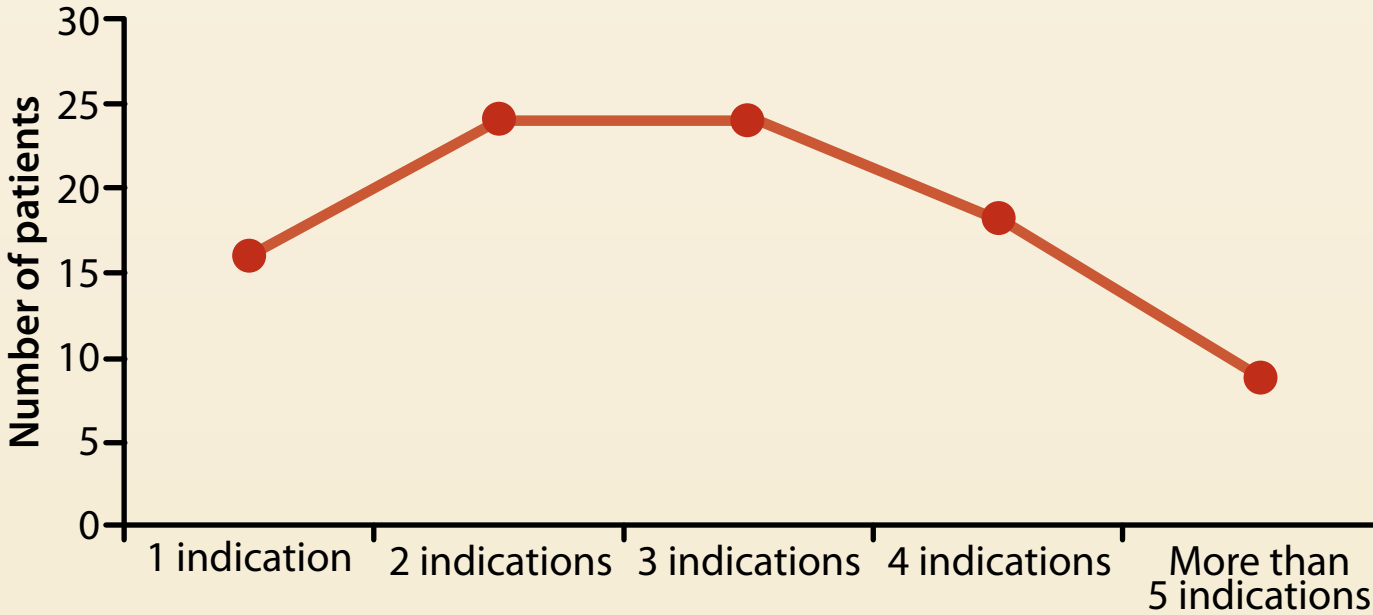


Figure 3: Number of indications for CPS administration per patient (mean = 2.8 indications; median = 3 indications)



Conclusion

- Continuous palliative sedation was used in 5% of terminal cancer deaths over a 7 year period.
- The main indications for administration were respiratory problems and delirium.
- Patients were comfortable at the moment of death while receiving continuous palliative sedation.