



OPIS
Organisation for the
Prevention of
Intense Suffering



PRESS RELEASE

Morphine as a human right: Experts at UN event call for access to treatment for severe pain

Geneva, Switzerland, 14 March 2018 – Millions of children and adults in low- and middle-income countries, inflicted with terminal or life-threatening illnesses and suffering from severe physical pain, are unable to access morphine, an effective treatment that is easy and inexpensive to produce. As a call to action to address this devastating but solvable situation, the Organisation for the Prevention of Intense Suffering (OPIS), a Swiss think-and-do tank, and International Doctors for Healthier Drug Policies (IDHDP), a London-based network, are today holding a side event with expert panellists during the 37th session of the UN Human Rights Council, titled “Ending the Agony: Access to Morphine as an Ethical and Human Rights Imperative”.

The lack of access to morphine and similar opioids is largely due to overly strict government regulations based on disproportionate concerns about dependence and diversion, and a historical neglect of suffering within many medical systems. The opioid epidemic in the United States, which has received widespread attention, is a serious but distinct problem with its own specific causes. As part of the call to action, OPIS has produced a [summary guide](#) to the issue of access to morphine. Specific steps governments can take to solve the problem include:

1. Develop a centralised strategy
2. Adapt regulations to ensure better balance between access and control
3. Aim for an ambitious scale-up of training and oral morphine distribution
4. Destigmatise use of morphine and other opioid analgesics

Speaking at the event are the following expert panellists:

- Jim Cleary, MD, Executive Director of the Pain & Policy Studies Group (PPSG), which is at the international forefront of efforts to improve global pain relief by achieving balanced access to opioids
- Marie-Charlotte Bouësseau, MD, Adviser at the World Health Organisation, who is coordinating the implementation of the 2014 World Health Assembly resolution on palliative care
- Heloísa Broggiato, a doctoral researcher at Swansea University carrying out field research on the issue of access to morphine and other opioids in Brazil
- Cécile Choudja Ouabo, MD, co-head of mission of the paediatric palliative care program at Médecins du Monde Suisse



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Jonathan Leighton, Executive Director of OPIS, said, “There is no valid justification for depriving people in severe pain of an effective treatment. We urge governments and health ministries of countries with insufficient access to morphine to take the initiative and make pain relief and palliative care a high priority of their medical systems.”

Sebastian Saville, Executive Director of IDHDP, said, “It is completely unacceptable that over 75% of the world’s population have little or no access to medicines for the treatment of severe pain, while the other 25% take it for granted. It is high time that the red tape that perpetuates this situation becomes a thing of the past.”

About OPIS

The Organisation for the Prevention of Intense Suffering (OPIS) is a Swiss think-and-do tank putting compassion at the heart of the society of the future. OPIS promotes the ethical principle that nothing matters more than preventing or relieving the physical or emotional suffering of sentient beings, both humans and non-humans, with highest priority given to those suffering most intensely. OPIS’s vision is a gentler world where the needs of all are met, and where decision-making is rational, evidence-based and suffering-focused. OPIS strives to make a difference through research, education, advocacy and creative communications, promoting both ethical systemic change and solutions to specific causes of preventable suffering. OPIS was founded in 2016 and is headquartered in Geneva. www.preventsuffering.org

About IDHDP

International Doctors for Healthier Drug Policies (IDHDP) is a London-based international network of medical doctors with 1600 members from over 100 countries. The work of IDHDP is guided by the principle that drug policies should be based on the health of individuals and society. IDHDP aims to protect society and the individual from drug-related death and disease through public health initiatives; ensure that people who use drugs are seen as people first rather than criminals; and improve access to essential medicines, including for the treatment of substance problems, the treatment of HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C and tuberculosis, and the treatment of pain. www.idhdp.com

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