

The Lethal Drug Mixtures

Background

By 2017, there were six States in the US with laws that allow the prescribing of lethal drugs that the terminally ill may take orally to end their lives under special circumstances. This increase in the number of States was accompanied by a rapid rise in the cost of the barbiturates, long considered the best drugs for a peaceful death. The steep increase in the price of barbiturates in the US and Canada has not been duplicated in the European countries with end of life legislation, where the barbiturate Nembutal remains the drug of choice.

With the French manufacturer of Nembutal refusing to export the drug to the US for the purpose of execution, the supply restriction led to a steep cost rise for this drug, and for an elective death the price reached a prohibitive ~\$20,000. The second most suitable barbiturate, Seconal, manufactured by the Canadian company Valeant, also underwent a steep price rise, and by early 2015 was costing ~\$1500/ death.

This led to pressure in the US to develop a cheaper alternative to the barbiturates, and in 2014, activist doctors in Washington State developed a new '3-Drug Protocol' as a cheap alternative. Although effective, difficulties experienced in swallowing the drug combination led in late 2016 to an improved '4 Drug protocol', also known as 'DDMP'. These mixtures are now in common use in the US for those using assisted suicide legislation.

* Exit acknowledges the assistance of Drs Robert Wood, Carol Parrot and Sally McLaughlin for providing detail on the mixed drug protocols

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The 3 and 4-drug combinations are comprised of readily available pharmaceuticals and can be taken orally without medical assistance to provide an effective elective DIY death. This Chapter provides details of these newly-developed protocols.

* For more background see: <http://khn.org/NjgyNzc3>

The 3-Drug Protocol

The three drugs involved in the so-called 3-drug protocol are Morphine Sulphate, Chloral Hydrate and the (slow but available) barbiturate, Phenobarbital. The drugs and the quantities required are shown in the diagram below.

3 Drug Protocol

- Chloral Hydrate 20gm
- Phenobarbital 20gm
- Morphine Sulphate 3gm



The ingredients in the 3-Drug Protocol

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Of these three drugs, morphine sulphate is the most difficult to source, given the restrictions on this addictive opiate. The sample pictured (sourced from the now-closed dark web drug market place ‘Silk Road’) contains 50 x 60mg tablets, or the 3gm of morphine sulphate required.

The second drug, Chloral Hydrate, is a sedative that has been in existence for many years and can be used as a lethal solo drug (see the Chloral Hydrate Chapter in this *Handbook*). Usually sourced on the Internet as a liquid, the bottle pictured has a concentration of 1gm/ 10ml, so the 200ml bottle would contain the required 20gms,

The final drug is the barbiturate, Phenobarbital. This slow-acting barbiturate is still prescribed as an anti-convulsant and can also be used as a solo end of life agent (see reference to Phenobarb in the ‘Taking Nembutal’ Chapter). The drug shown was sourced over the Internet. The illustration shows 200 x 30mg tablets, making a total of 6gm of the drug. Three or more bottles would be required for the necessary 20gm.

NOTE: Do not confuse *phenobarb* with *pentobarb* (Nembutal)

Using the 3-Drug Mixture.

With a mortar and pestle, the Phenobarb is crushed and then mixed with the crushed Morphine Sulphate tablets. Once the 200ml of Chloral Hydrate is added, the mixture should be stirred well before being drunk quickly.

Note: There are common reports of an unpleasant burning sensation at the back of the throat from the Chloral Hydrate. An anti-emetic, taken an hour before drinking this mixture is also recommended, . The suggested protocol is 2 x 10mg Metoclopramide tablets, along with 2mg of Haloperidol to increase relaxation, and enhance the anti-emetic properties of the Metoclopramide.

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The 4-Drug Protocol (DDMP)

Although effective, reports of difficulty with swallowing the 3-Drug mix has led to the further development of a 4-Drug or 'DDMP' protocol. In this drug mixture, Chloral Hydrate is replaced with the cardiac drug Digoxin, and the sedative Diazepam (Valium). The morphine sulphate remains and the *B*-Blocker, Propranolol, is added.

All of these drugs can be sourced on the Internet. Note, it is likely that Morphine will be the most difficult of the four drugs to obtain, and for DDMP, 10gm of morphine are required.

The required drugs are show below:

- 10gm of morphine
- x50 of 10mg tablets Valium (total 500mg)
- x25 of 80mg tablets Propranolol (total 2gm)
- x2 bottles (or 200 tablets) Digoxin (total 25mg)

4 Drug Protocol

- Diazepam (Valium) 500mg
- Digoxin 25mg
- Propranolol 2gm
- Morphine Sulphate 10gm



The components of the 4-Drug 'DDMP' Protocol.

Preparation and Use of the 4-Drug Protocol

Shortly before use, all the tablets are crushed and mixed together. The powder is then mixed with water, juice or one's preferred alcohol. The drink is then swallowed quickly as a suspension. While there is now no burning associated with the Chloral Hydrate in the 3 drug regime, the low (acidic) pH of the mixture may still give rise to an unpleasant taste. When the mixture is professionally (and legally) sourced from a compounding pharmacist, buffering agent is added to bring the pH up to a neutral 7. Note: The absence of the buffering agent does not effect the efficacy of the mixture.

A stat anti-emetic of 20mg of Metoclopramide and 2mg Haloperidol is advised to be taken one hour before using the 4-drug protocol.

Effectiveness of the Combination Drug Mixtures

A good deal of experience has now been gathered using these drug mixtures in the US, and the results show that they form a reliable, effective and cheaper alternative to the barbiturates.

The drug mixtures are a little slower than the barbiturates, with the average time of 7 min from ingestion to loss of consciousness (cf 5 min with Nembutal). For the 3-Drug protocol, the mean time to death is just under one hour, slightly slower for the 4-Drug protocol (cf Nembutal at ~ 20mins).

On some occasions, death took considerably longer, leading researchers to warn of several situations where these mixtures should not be used. These include for people with a history of using high levels of narcotic analgesics, those with a high alcohol intake, the morbidly obese, and those with uncontrolled nausea and vomiting.

Lethal Drug Mixtures

The cost savings for those in the US or Canada are likely to remain a determining factor - see diagram.

	Lethal Drug Option	Approximate US Cost
Option #1	Nembutal	~US\$20,000
Option #2	Seconal	~US\$4000
Option #3	Morphine, Phenobarb, Chloral Hydrate	~US\$500
Option #4	Morphine, Valium, Digoxin, Propranolol	~US\$600

Relative costs of the barbiturates and the 3 & 4 Drug protocols

The RP Test for the 4-Drug protocol (DDMP)

The 4-Drug protocol represents a reliable and peaceful (and cost effective) alternative to the barbiturates. Preparation is more involved, and the storage of the ingredients requires care. Availability scores better than Nembutal, however speed is slower. The result? A very credible 82%.

Criteria	Score
<i>Reliability</i>	10/10
<i>Peacefulness</i>	9/10
<i>Availability</i>	4/5
<i>Preparation</i>	3/5
<i>Undetectability</i>	4/5
<i>Speed</i>	3/5
<i>Safety</i>	5/5
<i>Storage</i>	3/5
Total	41 (82%)