

First shipment of morphine arrives in Sierra Leone

An [article](#) in the September 10, 2007 New York Times by Donald McNeil, Jr. described the inability to relieve severe pain in Sierra Leone because of phobia surrounding opioids leading to lack of opioid availability and access.

However, efforts by an [International Pain Policy Fellow \(IPPF\)](#) to obtain morphine in Sierra Leone have at last proven successful. Mr. Gabriel Madiye, a 2006 Pain & Policy Studies Group (PPSG) Fellow and his colleagues have been working with the country's Pharmacy Board and pharmaceutical supplier Macfarlan Smith to procure morphine for hospice patients needlessly suffering from pain due to cancer, AIDS, and other debilitating diseases.

Until very recently, oral morphine was not registered in Sierra Leone, one of the least developed countries in the world. Although affordable and effective for pain relief, morphine and other opioids are often not available or easily accessible in many low- to middle-income countries in the world, including Sierra Leone. Exaggerated fears of addiction and unduly strict drug control are enormous barriers that prevent access to pain-relieving drugs.

Mr. Madiye, founder and executive director of The Shepherd's Hospice in Freetown, Sierra Leone, has been an International Pain Policy Fellow, which began with a one-week training session with the PPSG at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. For the last two years Mr. Madiye has been working to improve opioid availability in his country with technical assistance from the PPSG. In the spring of this year, he and his colleagues contacted Macfarlan Smith to arrange the sale of morphine to his hospice. The next step was to convince the Sierra Leone Pharmacy Board to approve the necessary importation. A change in government facilitated the necessary cooperation.

In late August 2008, Mr. Madiye was finally notified that the Sierra Leone Pharmacy Board had signed the permit to import morphine and by the first week of October the morphine had arrived to The Shepherd's Hospice.

This is but one example of the important work being done by PPSG International Pain Policy Fellows with support from the [Open Society Institute](#) in low and middle income countries throughout the world. Additional information is available on the PPSG website at www.painpolicy.wisc.edu.