

# Hospital suspends trial of paramedics administering ketamine

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Hennepin Healthcare is suspending a clinical trial of the sedative ketamine in emergency situations following criticism that its hospital, Hennepin County Medical Center, enrolled patients in the study without their knowledge.

Paramedics' use of the sedative on agitated people during emergency calls is already the subject of an independent investigation commissioned by the City of Minneapolis. The number of documented ketamine injections during police calls increased from three in 2012 to 62 last year, according to an investigation by the Minneapolis Office of Police Conduct.

Hennepin County hospital researchers are trying to determine which of the drugs already in use to treat agitation—including ketamine—are the most effective. The study began last August. It requires no prior consent from patients, who can opt out.

State Sen. Jeff Hayden and Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin Monday called the hospital's clinical trial unethical.

"While we understand Hennepin Healthcare claims it has followed federal research procedures, we believe an urban hospital that treats a large number of people of color and low-income Minnesotans must take extra care," Hayden and McLaughlin's statement said. "Anything less disregards the history of maltreatment for these communities as test subjects for new drugs and medical procedures. This is unacceptable.

We can—and must—do better."

The hospital's physicians defend the drug as a vital tool for dealing with agitated and aggressive patients and said their consent procedures are legal and ethical.

"Anytime that we interact with EMS about this, we emphasize to them, crystal clear: In no way is the study ever to increase the number of sedations," said Dr. Jon Cole, emergency physician and toxicologist at Hennepin Healthcare.

Former Deputy U.S. Attorney General Sally Yates is leading the independent investigation into the Minneapolis Police Department's protocols and duty interactions with local Emergency Medical Services personnel.

Hospital officials have been asked to provide a report on the study to the Hennepin County Board Tuesday.

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