



D35 An Equivocal Death Investigation With Staged Crime Scene: Death Classified as Undetermined Manner

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The goal of this presentation is to present to the members of the forensic community the complications involved in an equivocal death investigation and the significance of the medicolegal findings in the police investigation. Why it is essential that police, prosecutor's and medical examiners work as a team.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by illustrating an alleged hanging and how the crime scene and medical evidence coupled with the victimology and inconsistent statements of the parents refutes any suicide theory. The audience should appreciate the importance and significance of the medical examiner, the police, and prosecution working as a team to reveal the truth and see that justice is done for the deceased.

Equivocal death investigations are those inquiries that are open to interpretation. There may be two or more meanings and the case may present as homicide, suicide, or accidental death. The facts may be purposefully vague or misleading as in the case of the "Staged Crime Scene."

In this case, an 11-year-old female was found hanging in her bedroom from a bedpost by means of a thick rusty metal chain, which had been wrapped several times around the top of the bedpost and connected to a blue colored metal hasp (described as a carabineer) that was connected by an "S" hook to a red colored leather dog collar, which was around the neck of the victim. The victim was fully clothed and was wearing eyeglasses perched on the end of her nose.

The police investigated the case as a suicide. Many of the parents' statements were inconsistent and revealed discrepancies in the chronology of the event. The father of the victim was eventually asked to take a polygraph test.

The medical examiner advised the authorities that medical examination of the child revealed sexual trauma to both the vagina and the anus of the 11-year-old consistent with penetration. The Medical Examiner also felt the death was suspicious for homicide.

The police questioned the father, who had failed the polygraph test. He eventually confessed to sexually assaulting his daughter but denied that he killed her. Police and Prosecution authorities believed that the victim had committed suicide because of his actions. The prosecutor's office advised the medical examiner that the case should be ruled a suicide, which was consistent with their prosecution theory.

The medical examiner refused to label the death a suicide and requested outside review of the findings. Three out of four consultants agreed with the medical examiner that the case was more consistent with homicide than suicide. The presenter concluded that the scene had been "staged" to make the death appear to be a suicide. This conclusion was based on the contradictory and inconsistent statements of the parents, the family history, the suspect's inappropriate past behavior, the victimology, which was not consistent with suicide, the intricate configuration of the ligature, and the incomplete police investigation. The medical examiner ruled the death Undetermined Manner.

The importance of the evaluation of victimology in determining the factors in an Equivocal Death Investigations as well as the importance of comparing autopsy findings with police investigation and the reconstruction of the crime scene are indicated.

Equivocal Death, Staged Crime Scene, Undetermined Manner