



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2007

I20 Andrea Yates Did Not Have Postpartum Psychosis

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the history and current status of the concept of postpartum psychosis; appreciate the importance of reliance on appropriate source of evidence when conducting a forensic evaluation; and recognize that reliance on proper sources of evidence offers no support for the proposition that Andrea Yates suffered from postpartum psychosis at the time of her offenses.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by counteracting the deleterious public and professional impact of the news media in the case of Andrea Yates.

A careful analysis of the forensic evidence developed in the case of *Texas v. Andrea Yates* demonstrates that her diagnosis does not meet the diagnostic criteria for postpartum psychosis, a diagnosis which has been essentially endorsed by the American Psychiatric Association and promulgated widely by the media.

When Andrea Yates drowned her five children on June 20, 2001, her story attracted national attention. A great amount of conjecture about her mental condition has been published since then, not only in lay publications, but also in the scientific literature.

Unfortunately, considerable misinformation about the case was published in Margaret Spinelli's "Maternal Infanticide Associated With Mental Illness: Prevention and the Promise of Saved Lives", to which the American Psychiatric Association (APA) drew a great deal of scientific and public attention by selecting as the 2004 Manfred Guttmacher awardee. In her Guttmacher Award address Dr. Spinelli asserted that Andrea Yates suffered from postpartum psychosis at the time of her offenses.

However, in discussing the case and making public a diagnosis of Mrs. Yates, Dr. Spinelli relied largely on inaccurate media reports. She disregarded such forensic evidence as crime scene evidence bearing on Mrs. Yates' mental condition, and observations and interviews of the defendant by law enforcement personnel on the day of the offense. The overall effect of Dr. Spinelli's speaking and writing has been to misinform the public, and to discredit the forensic process in psychiatry by her reliance on a grossly flawed method of study.

The presenter was a psychiatric consultant to the Harris County District Attorney's office prior to and during the Yates second trial, and observed in this capacity the presentation of all evidence at Mrs. Yates' second trial. She also had full access to medical records, police reports, court transcripts, videotaped interviews of Mrs. Yates, and other evidentiary materials pertaining to both the first and second trial.

Andrea Yates, Postpartum Psychosis, Standards of Forensic Evidence