



D7 Assessment of Living Siblings While Conducting a Comprehensive Child Death Investigation

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The goal of this presentation is to describe the essential components that must be considered in child death investigations. It will analyze procedures to determine children at risk for abuse and the collaborative components of a forensic multidisciplinary team. The presence of physical and mental injury will be demonstrated and the outcome from a case review.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community and/or humanity by demonstrating the need to conduct a thorough investigation to ascertain the entirety of the circumstances surrounding the death of a child and to determine if risk is present to associated children in the home to further protect them from harm.

Death by unnatural means require the death investigation team to research the historical components, the scene, and social history and along with the forensic pathologist's findings to determine the cause and manner of death. Child deaths command a thorough assessment of the home environment to determine risk in the remaining siblings. The following case will provide details of serious injury in two children subsequent to the death of their brother.

Potential sexual assault was suspected during the forensic investigation of a three year old male who was dead on arrival to the emergency department. Findings noted were the presence of petechia and anal dilation. Final autopsy reported cause of death to be asphyxiation due to cohabitation during sleep and the manner of death was ruled accidental.

The case was investigated by the Child Advocacy Center (CAC) in conjunction with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and local law enforcement. Child protective services, part of the multidisciplinary team at the CAC initiated a risk assessment on the siblings remaining in the home. A five-year-old male and an eight-year-old female were temporarily removed from the home pending the outcome of the investigation. Forensic interviews were conducted using the Finding Words protocol on both children. Each was referred for forensic medical examinations.

The medical examination was conducted by a forensically trained pediatrician and a forensic nurse examiner certified in adult and pediatric sexual assault. Evidence of injury was found in both children. Additionally, they each exhibited significant psychological stress and trauma. Both children exhibited behavior issues, aggressivity in play and delayed development. Each child was referred for intensive psychological treatment on site by a licensed therapist.

Further investigation provided a background of previous intervention by DSS in another county for neglect. The social history determined the primary care provider was the father who was unemployed and disabled. The mother was employed outside the home during the daytime.

The outcome of the case is permanent removal of both children with the parents relinquishing custody of their children to the state. Current status of the female is ongoing intensive therapy in a state mental facility. The male sibling resides in a group home for boys with all efforts exhausted for foster placement.

Child Death Investigation, Forensic Nurse, Child Abuse