



Pathology Biology Section – 2009

G86 Undiagnosed Preeclampsia-Eclampsia Leading to Maternal Death

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After viewing this presentation, attendees will appreciate how common preeclampsia-eclampsia is, the necessity for early diagnosis of the disorder, and the dangers encountered when it goes undiagnosed.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by bringing attention to a frequent complication of pregnancy that can be deadly if overlooked by healthcare providers. With more attention and continuing research, this disorder will be better understood, and future mothers who suffer from the disorder will potentially be saved.

Preeclampsia-eclampsia is a common hypertensive disorder of pregnancy with significant global morbidity and mortality. This disorder can be effectively treated with early recognition, but imposes serious risks for both the mother and the fetus when left untreated. Physicians sometimes fail to realize developing preeclampsia and, as a result, place both the mother and fetus in grave danger. The cause of this disorder is currently unknown, but many different ideas have been considered. Perhaps with a better understanding of the etiology of preeclampsia-eclampsia, physicians will less frequently overlook its warning signs.

The case of an 18-year-old pregnant black female found unresponsive on a pullout sofa in her apartment is reported. The decedent had received regular prenatal care at a local hospital. Medical records disclosed that she exhibited significant proteinuria of 8.8 g/24 hr five days prior to her death, with relatively normal blood pressure measurements. Instead of being admitted to the hospital, her physician elected to send her home on bed rest. Autopsy records revealed that the decedent was 38 weeks pregnant at the time of death, with autopsy examination revealing some well-known sequelae of preeclampsia-eclampsia, including intracerebral hemorrhage and platelet and fibrin microthrombi of the kidneys that indicated a thrombotic microangiopathy. Hepatocellular necrosis was also observed. The singleton pregnancy revealed an unresponsive male fetus with no evident developmental abnormalities. The cause of death was listed as complications of preeclampsia, with extensive intracerebral hemorrhage.

Preeclampsia-Eclampsia, Maternal, Death