



F42 Contributions of a Forensic Odontologist in a Criminal Child Abuse Dog Bite Case

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Forensic odontologists are often a part of a team effort to investigate criminal bitemark cases. Cases can involve human-human, animal-animal, or animal-human abuse situations.

After attending this presentation, attendees will have an appreciation of the contribution of a forensic odontologist in a criminal child abuse dog bite case spanning three years involving multiple agencies, the law enforcement officer suspect, the infant victim, and a dog.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by adding to the knowledge of case investigation and trial results.

In 2007, the State's Attorney requested the examination of injuries on a two-month-old female who was admitted to the hospital with life threatening injuries. The infant was in the care of her father, a police officer, at the time of the incident. He indicated that the family dog had injured his daughter and he drove her in the family car to the hospital for emergency care. The emergency room physician noted numerous superficial scratches, linear red marks, bruising, and a number of superficial circular lesions on the trunk of the infant as well as severe life threatening internal injuries. The child protection team was alerted.

There were a number of red flags associated with the parent's version of the events. First, the child was seriously injured and the father, a police officer, indicated that he "did not trust EMS" and decided he would drive the near death child to the hospital rather than use emergency services. The visual injuries were superficial yet the child had multiple posterior rib fractures, a lacerated spleen and liver, and was in respiratory distress. The emergency room physician indicated that her external examination was inconsistent with the parent's history that she sustained her injuries as a result of an attack by the family dog. The CTP medical examination suggested physical abuse.

This case evolved over three years involving multiple agencies, experts, including an animal psychologist and bitemark expert, culminating in a trial with unexpected results. The prosecution's case alleged child abuse by the father blaming the dog. The defense position was that the dog was entirely responsible. There was contentious testimony from the experts, including several medical examiners, about the cause and nature of the injuries. Were the deep crushing injuries the result of the dog or the father squeezing the torso out of anger and frustration? Could the dog have applied enough force to lacerate organs and break pliable ribs yet leave only very superficial marks with virtually no bleeding or puncture wounds? How did the one-zee pajamas end up off the infant almost unscathed if the dog viciously attacked the infant? With the child in extreme distress, why did the father elect to drive the infant to the ER rather than call 911? Were the circular marks of the skin from the dog's teeth or another source? Certainly the demeanor of the parents was inconsistent with the severity of the situation. The entire emergency room staff felt that the parents were hiding something. This case had a number of difficult issues that were difficult to prove with certainty that ultimately led to a controversial result.

Forensic Odontology, Animal Bitemarks, Child Abuse