



D94 Death by Starvation: A Case of Child Neglect

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the difference between marasmus, malnutrition, and failure to thrive and how these diagnoses may impact a child death investigation.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing information regarding fatal child starvation, the death investigation surrounding one case, and the legal outcomes which resulted.

Fatal child starvation is uncommon in the United States and much can be learned from those cases in which it does occur. This presentation describes a case study of an infant who died at nine months of age who weighed less than his birth weight. This case study will highlight the importance of a team approach while investigating deaths of infants and children. The case study will include information regarding the interview techniques, the scene investigation, the 911 recording, records review, autopsy, toxicology, genetic testing, and the child death review which were all utilized prior to ruling the death a homicide due to child neglect.

This case encountered legal challenges due to disagreeing opinions regarding the cause of the child's "failure to thrive." This case will highlight how the mention of a potential undiagnosed genetic disorder may complicate an investigation. Following autopsy, it was suggested that the infant may suffer from a genetic disorder, DiGeorge Syndrome. As a result of that suggestion, it was important to conduct a full genetic screen to determine if this child suffered from such a syndrome and if that syndrome played a role in the child's death.

Discussion will include the common physical findings and characteristics exhibited in pediatric starvation, the differences between marasmus, malnutrition, and failure to thrive, as well as the importance of the death scene investigation and medical record review. This case study is a useful tool in explaining the importance of an immediate death scene investigation and the information that may be obtained. This case also highlights the importance of obtaining and reviewing all medical, social, educational, and criminal records as a part of a complete child death investigation and how those records may be used in determining the manner of death and potential criminal charges which may result.

This case also highlights the importance of having qualified specialists conduct forensic interviews on living children who may have witnessed/participated in the care of a sibling who died. Information revealed during child forensic interviews, in this case, were found to provide very important information regarding the care and/or neglect which occurred, who the primary care takers were in the home, and in recommending counseling and treatment for those living children.

Child Death Investigation, Starvation, Marasmus