



Cases to Consider¹⁹

Case I: Homicide

Situation

Four-month-old Mary reportedly fell off the sofa and her father called 911 stating, “My baby isn’t breathing.” The Fire Department/Emergency Medical Response Team (EMT) and the Police arrived and the baby was taken to a hospital in a neighboring county where she died. The hospital noted bruises and made a child abuse report on the dead child. The Medical Examiner from the second county found old and new, multi-site, body bruises, subdural and retinal hemorrhages indicative of multiple assaults, and shaken/impact syndrome. The child had been living with her parents and a five-year-old half brother, who was subsequently placed in foster care. Previous Child Protective Services (CPS) records noted the 20-year-old mother had a history of being a victim of sexual abuse as a child.

Outcome and Recommendations

The coroner designated the case a homicide with blunt force trauma to the head, noting child abuse and neglect. Police and CPS shared information and resources within their county where the child actually died. The coroner shared the autopsy with law enforcement in the originating county where the family resided. It took a year for criminal prosecution but team data noted the conviction and sentencing of both parents. The Team also asked for procedures for sharing records across county lines, a joint meeting with the second county’s team to learn to share information, and grief support for the brother including allowing him to attend the funeral.

Follow-up

The teams sent visitors to each other’s CDRT meetings and set up procedures to share. The brother was not taken to the funeral, but procedures were created for future cases and he was taken to visit the grave. A hospital pediatrician attended the autopsy. The team learned that the mother was 15 the first time she became pregnant. Consultation was sought on the potential effects of sexual abuse on parenting.

¹⁹ Refer to SECTION FIVE: Virtual Reviews of Child Fatalities for more case examples.

Case II: Suicide

Situation

Fifteen-year-old Melvin was found with a handgun at his side and a single bullet wound to his head. He had left a suicide note stating he was upset about the loss of a friend. The Coroner found no other wound and designated the death suicide. CPS had no record, but Juvenile Probation did, and contacts with the Department of Probation revealed information of a long term depression and history of petty crimes. The school was notified and provided support for the students and faculty.

Outcome and Recommendations

The case was well managed as a suicide by systems already in place. Parents, peers and a four-year-old sibling went to the funeral and found support. Other child death review teams asked for protocols on case management after the death, including funerals and grief support. The Team also asked for an investigation on why the handgun was available.

Follow-up

The father later destroyed the gun. A Safe-Firearms campaign was planned with the Public Health Injury Prevention Program. Probation became involved with community education to address issues of trigger locks and safe storage of firearms, particularly in homes where children reside.

Case III: Accidental or Unintentional Injury

Situation

Three-year-old Carol rode her tricycle into the driveway and was hit and killed by her mother who was backing her car out. Carol had told her mother many times that she wanted to “drive just like Mommy.”

Outcome and Recommendations

This was investigated and found to be a preventable tragedy, but there was no criminal culpability.

Follow-up

The team joined Kids ‘N Cars to campaign for vehicle passenger and pedestrian safety with young children.

Case IV: Undetermined (Neonatal)

Situation

A four-day-old infant girl was found in bed with her mother who had fallen asleep while breast-feeding. The death scene, investigation and autopsy found little. The case was labeled as being of an Undetermined Manner. Suffocation was considered, possibly from adult soft bedding.

Outcome and Recommendations

The case was treated as a preventable injury.

Follow-up

The mother and family eventually joined the agencies on the team to make public announcements about safe sleeping environments and to provide material to all new parents.

Case V. Natural (SIDS)

Situation

A three-month old was found face down in her crib. She was not breathing. A 9-1-1 call bought medical care, but the child could not be revived.

Outcome and Recommendations

Other causes of death were ruled out and the baby was designated as dying from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Follow-up

The family received SIDS family support. The Health Department recorded the face down position of the baby at death and asked the hospital of birth about their “Back to Sleep” SIDS Prevention Program.