





Case Report

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Case report of 5 siblings: malnutrition? Rickets? DiGeorge syndrome? Developmental delay?

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Abstract

Background

Parents of six children are facing a trial on charges of aggravated manslaughter in the care a 5 1/2 month old infant who died suddenly and neglect of their four older children for causing them to be malnourished by feeding them all an exclusively raw foods vegan diet. Both parents declined plea bargains and plan to defend themselves in court.

Case presentation

The fifth child born to a married couple was breast-fed until 2 1/2 months. Subsequently, the parents fed the baby an exclusively raw foods diet prepared in a blender at home. The four older children, ages 18 months – 6 1/2 years also ate an exclusively raw foods vegan diet. None of the four older children had significant previous injuries or serious illnesses. At autopsy, the infant weighed 3180 mg (6.99 pounds) and appeared emaciated. The thymus gland was absent and parathyroid glands were not located. The lungs were "congested." DiGeorge anomaly cannot be ruled out from these findings. Although, the coroner ruled that "malnutrition" was the sole cause of death, malnutrition, according to the World Health Organization definition, cannot be diagnosed in this infant. Compared with standard growth charts, the older children fell 2.1–4.1 standard deviations below the mean for North American children in height and weight. Labs were normal except for a low cholesterol level in all and a low prealbumin in one of three children tested. Therefore, malnutrition cannot be diagnosed in these children. The pediatrician diagnosed rickets in the four-year-old. However, chest x-rays were normal in all and long bone x-rays showed minimal changes in one child – no sign of rickets. The clinical diagnosis of rickets was not confirmed by the Center for Disease Control's criteria. A psychologist diagnosed the 18-month-old as developmentally delayed to the level of a 15-month-old, but this diagnosis is questionable.

Conclusion

The raw foods vegan diet and possibly inherited small stature from the father's side account for their relatively low heights and weights. Catch-up growth will probably occur on the standard American diet but would have also been

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expected if they had remained on a vegan diet.

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