

DOCTOR SAYS DRUG DID NOT KILL GIRL - TESTIMONY DISPUTES DEFENSE CLAIM IN TRIAL

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Thursday, February 21, 2002

A pediatrician who treated 9-month-old Tatijuana Neal testified Wednesday that the child could not have died from any medications given to her at the hospital.

The doctor's testimony disputes defense claims that Tatijuana died because barium was accidentally inserted into her lungs.

Tatijuana died at St. John Hospital in Detroit last August. **Mario Angelo Smith**, 18, is accused of beating the girl in a hospital bathroom because she would not stop crying. She was in his care as her mother, **Smith**'s girlfriend, received treatment at the hospital.

Smith's defense attorney, Robert Morris, asserts that barium, which is used along with a CAT scan to detect internal injuries, was mistakenly given to Tatijuana.

But Dr. Alina Witkowski, co-director of the pediatric intensive care unit at St. John, testified "the drops of barium would never cause death."

Witkowski said some drops of barium did escape from Tatijuana's mouth and nose, but the amount was too small to cause any adverse reaction. In addition, Witkowski said, Tatijuana died about a half-hour after the last dose of barium. Tatijuana would have died much sooner if the drug was problematic, she said.

A medical examiner testified earlier this week that Tatijuana died from blunt-force trauma to the abdomen. Police and prosecutors say **Smith** repeatedly hit the baby in the stomach at St. John Riverview Hospital. She sustained multiple liver lacerations, bleeding in the abdominal cavity, bruised lungs and tears to her adrenal glands, which are near the kidneys.

A nurse at St. John Riverview testified Wednesday that when **Smith** brought the baby to her, she was barely breathing. The nurse said Tatijuana was taking 3-6 breaths per minute; a child her age normally would take 36-40 breaths per minute, she said.

Testimony continues today in Wayne County Circuit Judge Leonard Townsend's courtroom. **Smith** is charged with first-degree murder, felony murder and first-degree child abuse. If convicted, he faces life in prison with no chance of parole.

Meanwhile, opening statements in the murder trial of Harold Reed, who is accused of fatally beating 3-month-old Isaiah Lewis last August, will begin today. Jury selection and instructions were concluded Wednesday afternoon.

Prosecutors say Reed, 49, beat Isaiah to stop him from crying. Isaiah's mother handed the child to Reed, whom she had just met, at a bus stop on Woodward near State Fair. She left, and when she returned minutes later, both Reed and the child were gone. Isaiah's body was found six days later under a mattress in an abandoned house.

Contact SUZETTE HACKNEY at 313-222-6672 or hackney@freepress.com.

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

Page: 3B

Index Terms: TRIAL ; DEATH ; INFANT ; BEATING ; TRIAL ; DATE ; ST. JOHN
HOSPITAL

Record Number: 0202210468

Copyright (c) 2002 Detroit Free Press