

Child Fatality Review #09-13
Region 4
King County

This four-month-old Caucasian male died from hypoxia.

Case Overview

On March 7, 2009, this four-month old died at a King County hospital. He was admitted to the hospital on February 28, 2009 for breathing difficulties and a bronchiolitic cough. He was placed in the pediatric intensive care unit. On March 3, 2009, he experienced cardiac arrest resulting in neurological damage. A neurological examination on March 6, 2009 revealed that he would not recover. The family decided to withdraw life support on that date and the child died on March 7, 2009.

The autopsy was done at the hospital, not by the Medical Examiner. The cause of death was hypoxia (lack of oxygen) with the underlying causes of hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy (brain damage caused by hypoxia), and bronchiolitis (an acute viral infection of the small air passages of the lungs). The manner of death is natural.

Referral History

On May 6, 2008, a neighbor reported to Child Protective Services (CPS) intake that the deceased child's brother was with their mother's boyfriend at the school bus stop. The boyfriend appeared to be intoxicated. The referrer said the boyfriend is a drug dealer and was recently released from jail.

When the caller spoke with the mother, she also appeared high on some drug. The mother does not come to the school bus stop to pick up her son. The referrer walked him back to the mother's home several times. The referrer claimed the mother is a heroin addict and is on methadone as well as using methamphetamines.

This intake was screened in for investigation by CPS. The investigation revealed that the mother had an addiction to Oxycontin, which occurred after she was prescribed this drug for a prior injury. She was on methadone for this addiction. The mother submitted to random urinalysis which confirmed the only drug found was methadone. The issues with family members meeting the six-year-old at the bus stop after school were also resolved. The intake was accepted for investigation and closed with an unfounded finding for negligent treatment or maltreatment.

On February 4, 2009, a relative contacted CPS intake to report the deceased child's mother asked his father to take care of the child. The referrer felt that the father was incapable of caring for an infant. When the father picked up his son (the deceased child) from the mother he had a diaper rash, smelled badly and was dirty. The referrer said the mother is physically abusive toward the father and other adults. The referrer feared the

mother or her boyfriend could be a danger to the child. This intake was accepted for investigation by CPS.

This relative was caring for the child when the father was arrested. She called Seattle Police to report she could no longer care for the child. The deceased child was placed in protective custody by Seattle Police. The mother was unaware that this relative was caring for her son or that the child's father was arrested. The assigned social worker determined that the child could be safely returned to the mother with a safety plan.

On March 2 2009, the social worker received a message from the public health nurse (PHN) working with this family. She said that the deceased child was admitted to the hospital with Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). This attacks the lungs and breathing passages, and can be severe for infants. It is the most common cause of bronchiolitis and pneumonia in infants.

On March 6, 2009, the social worker received a call from a relative who reported the hospital was taking the deceased child off life support. The social worker made follow-up appointments with the family and obtained the medical records and death certificate. The investigation was closed with an unfounded finding.

Issues and Recommendations

Issue: None

Recommendation: None