

Parents on alert over transplant ops

THE death of a four-year-old Co. Down toddler after a kidney transplant operation has sparked a major UK alert.

Adam Strain died in Belfast's Royal Hospital in November just 24 hours after his operation during which he suffered a massive loss of blood.

The tragedy is now thought to be connected with a rare condition - involving sodium deficiency - which may have already claimed NINE other lives.

And hospitals carrying out renal transplants may face major changes to surgery procedures.

It was only at a Coroner's inquest into Adam's death - at which his mother Debra Strain, of Firmount Crescent, Holywood,

By JOE BRADY

revealed her son's constant problem with sodium deficiency - that the possible link between the two was made.

The Royal Hospital in Belfast has already changed its practices to monitor patients' fluid balances more closely.

Consultant nephrologist Dr Maurice Savage admitted that previously it was NOT general practice to measure sodium and potassium levels during surgery.

And he revealed that a probe was under way into nine other deaths in the UK which resulted from similar complications.

Mum tells coroner of heartache as son, 4, died

By Tanya Acheson

A HEARTBROKEN mother today told a Belfast inquest of her suffering as she watched her four-year-old son die after a kidney transplant.

Adam Strain, of Firrmount Crescent, Holywood, died after massive brain swelling following complications after the operation on November 28, last year.

"I would just like to say that when you give a child life you never expect to have to watch that being taken away

from them, but I did have to and that will be with me for the rest of my life," said his mother, Debra.

Adam had been born with kidney problems and had undergone several operations at the Ulster Hospital in Dundonald before being transferred to the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.

He was then admitted to Musgrave Park Hospital for the transplant operation.

Miss Strain said that during the operation she had been told by doctors that because of Adam's weight the sur-

gery was taking longer than expected.

When she saw him shortly after the operation, she said her son was bloated and looked completely different.

As Adam's condition deteriorated she was informed that there was little hope. The next day, following further tests, his respirator was turned off.

Pathologist Alison Armour said Adam's operation was a highly complex case due to problems with Adam's kidneys, his inability to eat properly, past surgery and his substantial blood loss during the transplant.

Inquest told of boy's low sodium levels at op

By Tanya Acheson

A FOUR-YEAR-OLD boy suffered critically low and extremely rare levels of sodium deficiency during a "difficult and prolonged" kidney transplant, an inquest has been told.

Adam Strain, from Firmount Crescent in Holywood, was born in August 1991 with kidney problems and surgery started when he was just three-months old.

He died on November 28 last year, a day after undergoing a transplant at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children when his mother was told there was "little hope" for her son.

At his inquest in Belfast yesterday, John Alexander, a consultant anaesthetist, said Adam's sodium levels should have been monitored.

Questioned about the boy's levels which had fallen to 123 and then to 119 during the operation, he said: "I would be very concerned if the serum level dropped below 120... every unit below the level of 123 would increase the risk of something going wrong."

He told the inquest he could not be sure if "the tragedy could have

been averted" had sodium been introduced during the operation.

Consultant paediatrician anaesthetist Edward Sumner, of Great Ormond Street Hospital, in London, said that Adam's condition was "very rare."

The operation would also have been made "slightly more difficult" because of the number of adhesions left from previous surgery.

He said he would have preferred to see readings for blood gas levels taken earlier than they were — more than two hours into the operation, which had started at 7am.

Mr Sumner said doctors were "rather late in starting blood transfusions."

Asked if Adam's sodium levels should have been monitored, he said: "It should have been known what the level was as close to the start of the operation as possible."

Earlier, pathologist Alison Armour described Adam's operation as "technically difficult" and "highly complex."

She registered the cause of death as cerebral oedema — swelling of the brain — due to a number of factors including low sodium.

The inquest was adjourned until Friday.

Death left me devastated — op doctor

THE Royal Hospitals Trust today announced a change of practice after the tragic death of a four-year-old boy during a kidney transplant operation, an inquest heard.

Adam Strain from Firmount Crescent, Hollywood, died from massive brain swelling following complications during his operation on November 28 last year.

After his death his mother Debra offered her son's organs to be used for other sick children.

Pathologist Alison Armour described Adam's operation as technically difficult and highly complex. She said death was caused by swelling of the brain due to a number of factors including low sodium.

In a statement the hospital's Trust said it is taking action in the light of the rare circumstances encountered in Adam's case and because of new information.

In future all patients undergoing paediatric surgery who potentially have an imbalance in salt levels will be carefully checked.

The Trust said where necessary intensive monitoring will be undertaken and all anaesthetists will be made aware of

Boy's death prompts action from Royal Hospital Trust

the possible complications.

Earlier consultant nephrologist Dr Maurice Savage said it is not general practice to measure sodium and potassium levels during surgery, and it is a matter of judgment for the operating team to decide if they should be measured before surgery.

The doctor said he had recently become aware of nine other deaths in the UK which shared similarities and would like to investigate.

"In view of Adam's death we now have to move to a situation where we measure electrolytes more frequently."

Dr Bob Taylor, consultant paediatric anaesthetist, said he was devastated by the unexpected and unexplained death of the child.

After giving detailed medical evidence on monitoring procedures during surgery he said

he did not understand the physiological mechanisms which led to Adam's death.

In hindsight I can't say what I would have done differently," he said.

Miss Strain was praised during the inquest for her devotion to her son.

Dr Savage, who had known Adam since he was a baby, said: "Her care of him was meticulous. He was the healthiest child waiting for transplant and that is a tribute to her."

He described how she controlled Adam's tube-feeding and dialysis and administered his medication.

The whole renal team was saddened and upset by the tragedy.

"Adam was a lovely, special sort of character. He will never be forgotten. His photograph is at the top of our ward," he added.

Coroner John Leckey also paid tribute to Miss Strain saying that she had carried an enormous burden.

He said this type of death is relatively rare but he agreed there should be further investigation into the other cases.