

Parents' shock as doctor stays silent on death

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By Ashleigh Wallace

THE parents of a Co Fermanagh toddler said they were "astounded" by the actions of a senior doctor who refused to give evidence during an inquest into their daughter's death.

Mae and Neville Crawford were speaking after a Belfast coroner concluded at the end of a three-day inquest that their daughter Lucy's death was caused "as a direct consequence of an inappropriate fluid replacement therapy".

The youngster was admitted to Erne Hospital in Enniskillen on April 12, 2000, after suffering bouts of vomiting.

The 17-month-old girl was placed on a drip to replace fluids lost by vomiting and diarrhoea but suffered a seizure. She was transferred to the Royal Victoria Hospital for Sick Children in Belfast but died on April 14.

A last-minute plea for further legal discussion was made during yesterday's sitting on behalf of Dr Jarlath O'Donaghue, who was the consultant paediatrician —

Chief medic to see inquest papers

THE papers relating to the inquest into Lucy's death are to be forwarded to both the Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland and the General Medical Council.

The decision to forward the inquest papers was taken by Belfast Coroner John Leckey, who concluded that the Fermanagh toddler died while under the care of

the Erne Hospital in Enniskillen.

During the inquest, it emerged that confusion surrounded procedures relating to fluid administration to children, which was highlighted last year during an inquest into the death of nine-year old Londonderry girl Raychel Ferguson who died in similar circumstances to Lucy in Al-

tnagelvin Hospital following a routine appendix operation.

Following Raychel's inquest, a working group was established to set out guidelines on the correct protocol to use when administering IV fluids to children. The papers from Lucy's inquest are also being sent to the GMC "to ensure this kind of thing doesn't happen again".

the medic in charge of Lucy's care at the Erne Hospital.

The application for an adjournment was refused by Coroner John Leckey, who read Dr O'Donaghue's statement to the inquest concerning Lucy's death.

Dr O'Donaghue revealed he administered Lucy's drip but said he believed a senior house officer, who worked at the hospital at the time but who has since returned to Pakistan, recorded what fluid was being prescribed.

Lucy was supposed to have been given 100 mls of fluid for the first hour, followed by 30 mls for the following hours. However, the child suffered a seizure several hours after being hooked up to the drip, with Dr O'Donaghue saying it was his "recollection" that around 500 mls were administered.

Mr Leckey said Lucy's death was caused by cerebral oedema — or swelling of the brain — caused by hyponatraemia (a fluid im-

balance), excess dilute fluid and gastroenteritis.

In a statement issued after Mr Leckey's findings were revealed, Mr and Mrs Crawford said: "We are astounded that Dr O'Donaghue, who was in charge of Lucy's care, refused to come forward, give evidence and answer questions."

"The pain at the loss of our daughter is compounded by the knowledge that her death was unnecessary and could so easily have been avoided."

Doctor silent on why toddler died

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AFTER waiting four years for a hospital to explain why their little girl died, Lucy Crawford's parents were astonished and angry when a doctor who treated their child refused to answer any questions at her inquest yesterday.

The toddler from Letterbreen in Fermanagh died after she was transferred from the Erne Hospital to the children's hospital in Belfast on April 14, 2000.

The cause of death was given as cerebral oedema - swelling of the brain - due to errors made in the fluid replacement therapy, compounded by poor-quality medical record-keeping and confusion by the nursing staff at the Erne Hospital as to the fluid regime prescribed.

On the final day of the Belfast inquest on the 17-month-old, Jariath O'Donaghue, consultant paediatrician at the Erne Hospital, declined to take the stand, saying that he had to protect his professional reputation.

In an unusual step, he asked the Coroner for Greater Belfast, John Leckey, to adjourn the case for the day while he sought independent legal advice separate from the Sperrin Lakeland Trust.

Dismissing Dr O'Donaghue's request as "unreasonable" and "not in the interest of justice", Mr Leckey said that he would

By SANDRA MURPHY
Health Correspondent

s.murphy@newsletter.co.uk

refer the case papers to the General Medical Council.

"I hope that this will try to ensure that no other child will die in the same tragic circumstances as Lucy," he said.

Mae and Neville Crawford expressed their disappointment that the lengthy ordeal could not be brought to an end with the help of all those responsible.

"We are astonished that Dr O'Donaghue, who was in charge of Lucy's care, refused to come forward, give evidence and answer questions at the inquest," they said.

After being put through the trauma of hearing every action that happened to Lucy in the final hours of her short life, Mr and Mrs Crawford were angry that they had not received an acknowledgement from the trust that it was responsible for her death.

"Our pain at the loss of our daughter is compounded by knowledge that her death was unnecessary and could have been so easily avoided," they said.

Earlier, the coroner heard from three expert witnesses, who agreed that the child's

care at the Fermanagh hospital was "sub-standard".

Consultant paediatrician John Jenkins said yesterday that a breakdown in communication between medical and nursing staff was responsible for causing the fundamental errors.

He said there was inadequate documentation and record-keeping on how much and what type of fluid she was given for dehydration.

On the previous day, an anaesthetist at the hospital, Dr Tom Auterson, said that the lack of adequate equipment and a three-hour wait for an ambulance was "not an acceptable situation".

He agreed with three medical experts whose reports concluded that the fluids used in Lucy's treatment were incorrect and used at the wrong rate of infusion.

Last night, Sperrin Lakeland HSC Trust issued a statement saying: "As an organisation dedicated to caring for people, we regret our part in this tragedy."

"Practice today at the Erne Hospital is different from the time of Lucy's death."

The statement added that the trust will study the coroner's conclusions and "will ensure that the organisation and others learn the lessons of this tragic case".

Toddler's death: hospital slammed

Wrong fluid 'may have been given to child'

By Ashleigh Wallace

THE standard of care at the Erne Hospital in Enniskillen came under criticism today by a medical expert called to give evidence into the death of a 17-month-old child.

Criticism was levelled at the "inadequate documentation and record keeping" by staff at the Enniskillen hospital who treated Lucy Crawford after she was admitted following bouts of vomiting on April 12, 2000.

Lucy, from Station Road, in Letterbreen, Fermanagh, was diagnosed as suffering from dehydration and gastro-enteritis and after several unsuccessful attempts were made to hook her up to a drip, she was eventually given fluids intravenously.

However, the toddler suffered a seizure and after a period in the Erne's intensive Care Unit, a decision was made to transfer her to Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital for Sick Children. She was diagnosed as being brain dead on arrival and after two brain scans were taken, Lucy was taken off her ventilator. She died on April 14, 2000 of cerebral oedema - or swelling of the brain - which may have been caused by being given the wrong fluid at the wrong rate of infusion. Giving evidence at the in-

quest - which is being held in Belfast and which is due to conclude today - Dr John Jenkins cited the toddler's death as tragic. Dr Jenkins, a consultant paediatrician from Antrim Area Hospital, was asked to give his opinion about the fluid regime administered to Lucy at the Erne Hospital, to which he replied: "Unfortunately there appears to have been confusion between staff involved as to the fluid regime ordered by the consultant." Dr Jenkins also said it was his opinion that the level of care provided to Lucy "fell below standard".

The medical expert told the Coroner's Court that in 2000, paediatricians in both Northern Ireland and the rest of Britain, were not fully aware of the dangers of using certain solutions to treat children such as Lucy. There was a lack of understanding of the dangers of that course of action at that time," said Dr Jenkins.

Hospital is lambasted in toddler death case

By Anne Madden
Health Correspondent

THE case of a baby girl who died as a result of "sub-standard" treatment at a Co Fermanagh hospital has been referred by a coroner to the General Medical Council (GMC). An inquest into the death of 17-month-old Lucy Crawford, from Letterbreen, Co Fermanagh, found that her death was the direct consequence of a series of failures at the Erne Hospital in Enniskillen.

The baby was admitted on April 12, 2000, suffering from gastro-enteritis, which causes vomiting and diarrhoea. The condition made her dehydrated but the inquest heard that she was given excessive amounts of the wrong fluid, which led to brain swelling and her subsequent death on April 14.

Belfast coroner John Leckey said errors were compounded by poor quality medical record-keeping and confusion by the nursing staff as to the fluid regime prescribed. Mr Leckey said he hoped mistakes had been learned by staff and that "no other children will die in the same circumstances as Lucy".

The family of Lucy Crawford (9), who died in similar circumstances in Derry's Altnagelvin Hospital in 2001, also heard the inquest's findings.

Dr Jarlath O'Donoghue, the children's consultant who was in charge of Lucy at the Erne, refused to take the witness stand in court yesterday shortly before he was due to give evidence.

However, in a written statement to the inquest, he said he had only administered the initial dose of fluid and had left instructions on the fluid prescription which had been recorded by a junior doctor.

A solicitor for Lucy's family said after the loss of their daughter is compounded by the knowledge that her death was unnecessary and could so easily have been avoided.

The baby's mother, Mrs Crawford, told the inquest earlier this week that she held Sperrin Lakeland Trust, which runs the Erne, "wholly accountable and responsible for Lucy's death".

The court heard that almost a year after her death, an independent investigation ordered by the trust found no fault with the level of care she received at the Erne. Mr Leckey said he was "deeply concerned" by this, considering the evidence of three children's specialists at the inquest who agreed that Lucy's care had been "woefully substandard".

In a statement yesterday, Sperrin Lakeland Trust said it regretted its part in the tragedy but that practices at the Erne had changed since 2001.

The coroner said he would refer the case to the GMC and chief medical officer, but would not submit a file to the DPP. However, he said the police might choose a different course of action. A spokesman said police had "noted the comments of the coroner and the matter is now under consideration".

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Hospital criticised over baby death

By Ashleigh Wallace

A CONSULTANT anaesthetist from the Erne Hospital in Enniskillen told an inquest that a suitable ventilator to assist a 17-month-old baby was not available due to their being no paediatric intensive care unit at the hospital.

Dr Tom Auterson revealed that when little Lucy Crawford was admitted to

the Erne Hospital in April 2000, they were not equipped with a paediatric ventilator and had to "make do with adult machinery".

However, around one year after the tragic death, Erne Hospital equipped itself with a suitable ventilator.

Lucy, from Station Road in Letterbreen, near Enniskillen, was admitted to the Erne Hospital on April

12, 2000, after suffering from bouts of vomiting. She was hooked up to an IV drip but after suffering a seizure, the decision was taken to transfer her to Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital for Sick Children. She passed away from a cerebral oedema or swelling of the brain on April 14.

A number of medical experts called to give evidence at the inquest criticised the

inappropriate prescription and dosage of fluids given to the youngster via the IV drip. This, they said, could have led to the brain swelling.

Dr Auterson was asked to give his views on the fluids Lucy was given.

He said: "I would have to agree that too much of the wrong fluid was given."

The inquest is due to conclude today.

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Care of Lucy not up to standard, says consultant

Lessons learned from child's death

A CONSULTANT paediatrician at the Erne Hospital yesterday criticised the care given to a 17-month-old child who died after she was treated in the hospital four years ago.

Lucy Crawford died after she was transferred to Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital for Sick Children on April 14, 2000. The cause of death was perinatal asphyxia, or swelling of the brain.

Dr. Tom Anderson, consultant paediatrician at the Erne Hospital, told Belfast Coroner's Court that the lack of adequate equipment in the Fermanagh hospital and the three-hour wait for an ambulance was "not an acceptable situation".

He added that three medical experts whose reports concluded that the child died in her treatment were incorrect and used as the wrong rate of infantile.

"Having heard previous statements and reports, I agree Lucy's care and management was not up to standard."

"The lesson has been learned and hopefully will never occur again," Dr. Anderson said.

Coroner for Glenagh Belfast John

By SANDRA MURPHY
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Doctor slams care given to tot

By Ashleigh Wallace

Hospital criticised at inquest

The level of care given to a 17-month-old baby girl who was admitted to the Erne Hospital in Enniskillen was "significantly below an acceptable standard for a hospital in the British Isles", a Coroner's Court was told.

Dr Dewi Evans, a consultant paediatrician from the Department of Child Health in Swansea, criticised the hospital at an inquest today dealing with the death of Lucy Rebecca Crawford.

The Fermanagh youngster died in Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital for Sick Children in Belfast on April 14, 2000 after she was transferred from the Erne Hospital.

Lucy, from Letterkenny, was admitted to a children's ward in the Erne Hospital on April 12 after suffering from bouts of vomiting and failure to intake enough fluids.

During her brief stay in the hospital, she was given fluids through an intravenous drip.

However, the youngster

suffered a seizure and was taken to the intensive care unit at time before she was transferred to the Royal Dr Evans flew into Northern Ireland to give evidence at the inquest at the request of the solicitors representing the Crawford family.

As well as branding the care given to the Lucy as "below an acceptable standard", Dr Evans also described the documentation on the fluids given to the youngster via the drip as "woefully substandard".

The Welsh doctor told today's hearing in Belfast that if Lucy had been given the right treatment at the Erne, it could have prevented cerebral oedema - or swelling of the brain - which claimed the little girl's life.

At hearing.

Baby death: coroner calls top-level probe

By Anne Madden
Health Correspondent

The chief medical officer has been asked to investigate how a hospital was cleared of wrongdoing in the case of a baby girl who died after being given "too much of the wrong fluid".

Seventeen-month-old Lucy Crawford from Letterkenny, Co Fermanagh, died on April 14, 2000 as a result of swelling to the brain, known as cerebral oedema.

At an inquest sitting in Belfast this week, three children's specialists have criticised medical staff at the Erne Hospital in Co Fermanagh for "fundamental errors" in Lucy's treatment, which led to the fatal swelling.

The court heard yesterday that Sperrin Healthcare Trust had commissioned an independent investigation, carried out by a doctor from Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry, into Lucy's treatment at the Erne.

Almost a year after her death the trust wrote to her parents informing them that the investigation had found no fault with the level of care she had received.

"I totally feel concerned that the views that seem to have been expressed are as much at odds with the three experts giving evidence at this inquest," Coroner John Lockey said.

"I would not sleep easily if I did not take appropriate action."

Mr Lockey revealed that he would be writing to the medical director of Altnagelvin Hospital and the Chief Medical

Officer at the Department of Health to examine the report.

Earlier, a children's specialist from Wales, Dr Dewi Evans, said he was "astounded" to find the report had not criticised the Erne Hospital.

The level of care Lucy had received, he said, was "significantly below an acceptable standard for a hospital in the British Isles".

Dr Evans agreed with other experts that the wrong fluids in the wrong dosage had been administered, which had caused Lucy's brain to swell.

He said medical staff had failed to assess her condition accurately and that there had been a breakdown of communication between doctors and nurses. He also criticised "very bad note-taking"

as unacceptable.

Dr Tom Anderson, consultant paediatrician from the Erne, who was summoned to the hospital after Lucy's condition had deteriorated, agreed that the care she had received was "not up to standard".

"I would never agree that too much fluid was given," he said.

Dr Anderson said practices regarding fluid management had changed with the publication of protocols by the Department of Health after the death of Co Derry girl Rachel Ferguson, who died of the same complication in 2001.

However, he said the protocol was "based on information that has been available for a long time".

The inquest is expected to finish today.

Mother urges medics to prevent further deaths

By Anne Madden
Health Correspondent

RAYCHEL HE mother of a nine-year-old girl who died in similar circumstances to Lucy Crawford said medical staff must heed the findings of yesterday's inquest to help prevent further deaths.

Marie Ferguson's daughter Raychel died from swelling of the brain as a result of incorrect administration of fluids at Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry in June 2001.

Raychel had undergone a routine appendix operation but afterwards she was violently sick over a 12-hour period.

The little girl from Coshquin in Co Derry later experienced a seizure and stopped breathing. An inquest into her death last February found that she would have survived if she had been given a saline solution to counteract the dehydration and loss of vital salts caused by vomiting but as in the case of 11-month-old Lucy Crawford, from Letterbreen, Co Fermanagh, the inquest concluded that Raychel had died from acute cerebral oedema - swelling of the brain - brought on by a water imbalance or hyponatraemia.

Concerns raised at Raychel's inquest about the management of fluids for sick children led to the chief medical officer for Northern Ireland issuing guidelines in 2002 as a reminder to all medical staff.

"I get so angry about this. If the problem had been made public then, it could have saved Raychel and Lucy's lives"

Marie Ferguson

ATA GLANCE...

Hospital staff have been urged to heed the findings of an inquest into the death of a nine-year-old girl.

"I hope for the sake of other children that these guidelines are being adhered to," Mrs Ferguson, who is suing Altnagelvin Hospital, said.

"How many other cases have there been that we don't know about? Somebody should be held accountable for this."

"Our lives were ruined. Raychel was our only daughter. The first recorded incident of a fatal brain swelling caused by fluid management was in the mid-1960s."

Mrs Ferguson criticised the health authorities for not taking action sooner to improve medical practice.

"I get so angry about this," she said.

"If the problem had been made public then, it could have saved Raychel and Lucy's lives."

The guidance issued by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety urges medical staff to be vigilant when administering fluids to children and details the type and correct dosage of solutions.

Dr John Jenkins, a children's specialist from Antrim Area Hospital, yesterday told the inquest into Lucy's death that before the guidelines in 2002 the correct management of fluids was "not well clarified".

"There was a lack of widespread understanding of the dangers at that time, not only in Northern Ireland but in Great Britain," he said.

Dr Jenkins said he was "not surprised" at the type of solution used at the Ernie Hospital, where Lucy had been treated, but he criticised the "excessive" fluid prescribed and the lack of record-keeping.

■ HEARTBROKEN: Ray and Marie Ferguson with a portrait of their daughter Raychel who died at Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry in June 2001 after fluid was incorrectly administered to her.