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Making Northern Ireland Safer For Everyone Through Professional, Progressive Policing

Dear Doctor Harding

Re expert opinion on the death of Claire Roberts

Thank you for agreeing to assist the Police Service of Northern Ireland in this matter.

Claire Roberts, 9 years old with a history of epileptic seizure, was admitted to the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children on 21 October 1996 following some vomiting at school. Hospital doctors informed her parents that they suspected Claire was suffering from a viral infection. She was given 0.18% saline. She was comfortable throughout the next day but at 0345 hours on 23 October she experienced breathing difficulties and cerebral oedema was detected. She did not recover and life support was discontinued at 1845 hours on that date.

At our meeting on 25 June 2007 I will provide you with the following:

1. The Autopsy Report of Dr Herron.
2. A letter from Dr Walby, RBHSC dated 16/12/04 which sets out some of the history to our investigation.
3. The Verdict on Inquest.
4. 32 H&E Stained slides, 23 Immunohistochemically stained slides, 4 semi thins.
5. A letter from Mr Alan Roberts, Claire's father, to his solicitor Mr Barr, setting out Claire's condition. This highlights facts which he disputes with the doctors' accounts.

I am also in possession of the following which I have not included in the papers:

6. Expert report of Dr R M Bingham FRCA.
7. Expert report of Dr Ian Maconochie FRCPCH FFAEM.
8. Statement of Professor Ian Young, Clinical Biochemist, by way of expert report.
9. Statements from various medical personnel involved in Claire's assessment and treatment.
10. Letters between the family and the hospital regarding Claire's care.
11. A copy of Claire's medical notes.

I will have all these in my possession at our meeting and should you decide that any are of assistance to you, they can be provided then or at any later time.

I have obtained the tissues and slides from Dr Herron, Royal Group of Hospitals, Belfast. He has informed me that he retained a very small amount of tissue in a freezer and this could be provided later if required but it needs to be transported in a frozen state. Also he has retained the paraffin blocks as if they are lost, they are irretrievable. You have already

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Serious Crime Branch**

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confirmed to me that you do not require the blocks, but should this change at any time I will have them brought to your office.

Our specific request to you is that you examine the material and provide Police with:

12. Your observations of the brain tissue, both in medical terminology and with an explanation suitable for lay people.
13. Your opinion on the presence of encephalitis or any similar condition.
14. Your observations on the extent of such conditions, if they are as expected in a child with Claire's history and whether or not they contributed to her death.
15. Your opinion on the causes of death and whether or not you concur with the Verdict on Inquest or with the original Death Certificate as reported in the letter at 2. above.
16. Any other matters which you see as relevant to Police consideration of this case.

As I have indicated by email Police have recently been made aware that Claire's death may be included in the remit of a Public Inquiry into the deaths of other children from hyponatraemia. This Inquiry has adjourned to allow Police to complete their enquiries into those deaths. Therefore Police wish to advance this matter as quickly as possible and hope that you will be able to provide us with an early reply.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



William R Cross
Detective Sergeant

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