

VERDICT

The Coroner found that Raychel Ferguson died on the 10th of June 2001, death being caused by cerebral oedema brought about by hyponatraemia. On the 7th of June she had complained of pain, which was revealed as appendicitis. She underwent an appendectomy and postoperative observations were normal. The following day she vomited a number of times. On the 9th of June she suffered a number of tonic seizures. She was transferred to the Royal Hospital in Belfast where she died.

The hyponatraemia was caused by a combination of inadequate electrolyte replacement in the face of post-operative vomiting and water retention resulting from the inappropriate secretion of ADH.

He commented that it had been a lengthy inquest, with complex medical issues. Hyponatraemia was not widely known about. Dr. Jenkins and Dr. Sumner had described it as a 'Cinderella' area of medicine. It was most common in female children, and can have catastrophic results, including brain damage and death.

This case was the second of its kind in the last seven or eight years in Northern Ireland. It was concerning that the first child's death had not become more widely known of. Dr. Campbell (?) had set up a working party to examine practice, and a new protocol was now in place. Dr. Sumner was of the opinion that Northern Ireland was now ahead of other countries in that regard.

Mr. Leckey said he was formally writing to the Chief Medical Officer asking that the condition be brought to the attention of her counter-parts in England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. Doctors Fulton and Nesbitt were of the opinion the protocol might need some amendment.

Dr. Sumner had provided a very clear and understandable report, for which the court was indebted. Dr. Jenkins had also been very helpful and concurred with Dr. Sumner. The Coroner also commented that he was grateful for the candour shown by all staff from Altnagelvin, which was essential to the inquest as it is concerned only with the facts. He was aware that certain issues were a matter of divergence in accounts for the parents. An inquest could not resolve those issues, and the Fergusons might be left with questions, but they were beyond the bounds of this hearing.

Mr. Leckey said Raychel's death was an absolutely dreadful event, for a child to die after a routine operation was terrible, the cause of her deterioration was not

immediately apparent, though by the time she reached the Royal staff there were in no doubt as to the cause being hyponatraemia.

Mr. Leckey concluded his comments by suggesting that if any lesson emerged it was that such medical information needs to be disseminated to all medical practitioners throughout the province, and hopefully this inquest change the previous practice.

He extended his deepest sympathy to the family.