

Commentary on: Sauvageau A, Bourgault A, Racette S. Cerebral traumatism with a playground rocking toy mimicking shaken baby syndrome. *J Forensic Sci* 2008;53(2):479–82

Sir,

Sauvageau et al. (1) report the case of a 2 year old who died following an observed head injury with bruising seen clinically and at autopsy, and a lucid interval lasting several hours. Death occurred during surgical evacuation of a subdural hematoma.

We are told nothing about the brain imaging nor of the nature, volume, or distribution of the subdural hemorrhage or the associated diffuse axonal damage, nor of the duration, or clinical state during the lucid interval.

“Surgical drainage of a left subdural hematoma” leads us to assume that this was a unilateral bleeding and the fact that surgery was undertaken suggests it was large and space-occupying mass.

From even this scanty information, this appears to be nothing like the bilateral thin-film subdural hemorrhage suggested by Guthkelch (2) to be due to shaking and has all the characteristics of subdural hematoma associated with impact (3,4).

This is a tragedy. A baby has died. He has had surgery, presumably brain scans, and an autopsy. There is material here for a case report, but we are given only fragmentary data, while considerable space is devoted to reiteration of ideas about shaken baby syndrome, despite overwhelming evidence of impact head injury.

The authors note “the importance of thorough investigation before concluding whether a head injury is caused by abuse cannot be emphasised enough” is ironic.

If only they had taken their own advice and presented a thorough, factual case report, we could all have learned something from this death, and be able to make up our own minds.

References

1. Sauvageau A, Bourgault A, Racette S. Cerebral traumatism with a playground rocking toy mimicking shaken baby syndrome. *J Forensic Sci* 2008;53(2):479–82.
2. Guthkelch AN. Infantile subdural haematoma and its relationship to whiplash injuries. *Br Med J* 1971;2(759):430–1.
3. Christian CW, Taylor AA, Hertle RW, Duhaime AC. Retinal hemorrhages caused by accidental household trauma. *J Pediatr* 1999;135(1):125–7.
4. Duhaime AC, Christian C, Armonda R, Hunter J, Hertle R. Disappearing subdural hematomas in children. *Pediatr Neurosurg* 1996;25(3):116–22.

Waney Squier,¹ F.R.C.P., F.R.C.Path.

¹Department of Neuropathology

Level One

West Wing

John Radcliffe Hospital

Oxford OX3 9DU, U.K.

E-mail: waney.squier@clneuro.ox.ac.uk