

**Commentary on:** Watterson J, Peaire A, Hinman J. "Elevated morphine concentrations determined during infant death investigations: artifacts of withdrawal of care." *J Forensic Sci* 2008; 53(4):1001-4.

Sir,

I am afraid that the authors of the article "Elevated morphine concentrations determined during infant death investigations: artifacts of withdrawal of care" (1) have had a fairy tale fostered on them by some members of the medical community in regard to two of the cases they report in their article. Case 1 is an obvious case of euthanasia. No physician in their right mind would administer 5 mg of morphine intravenously, let alone 10 mg in 15 min, to a 1-week-old child unless they wanted to kill the child. If one was going to administer morphine to a child of this age for either pain or to prevent gasping respirations at the time of the withdrawal from a ventilator, an appropriate dosage would be what was given in case 2, i.e., 0.1 mg/kg. In case 2, the appropriate amount of morphine was given and it did not cause or contribute to the death.

Case 3 is also a case of euthanasia involving administering a 5 mg bolus of morphine intravenously to a 2-year-old. Again, if one was going to administer morphine to a child of this age to prevent gasping respirations at the time of the withdrawal from a

ventilator, an appropriate dosage would be 0.1 mg/kg. Both cases 1 and 3 are clear-cut homicides.

The euthanasia of brain-injured children is not uncommon in some communities in the U.S. You can suspect a child is to be or was euthanized when their chart includes the phrases "neurologically unsalvageable," "significant neurologic injury, no chance of recovery", or a variation of this. Also look for "titrate for comfort" or "titrate to effect" in the orders for morphine. These children are examples of "Life unworthy of life" to the clinicians.

#### Reference

1. Watterson J, Peaire A, Hinman J. Elevated morphine concentrations determined during infant death investigations: artifacts of withdrawal of care. *J Forensic Sci* 2008;53(4):1001-4.

Vincent J.M. Di Maio,<sup>1</sup> M.D. and Ann M. Di Maio,<sup>2</sup> M.D.  
<sup>1</sup>Consultant in Forensic Pathology, 10 Carriage Hills  
San Antonio, TX 78257

E-mail: vincent\_dimaio@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor of Pediatrics  
St. Louis University Medical Center  
St. Louis, MO 63110

E-mail: vincent\_dimaio@yahoo.com