

## VERY IMPORTANT ERRATUM?—20 YEARS LATER

A 25-Year Trail to Murder Charges— . . . The first suspicions were raised in 1985 by Dr. Linda Norton, a former medical examiner for Dallas County, Texas, and an expert on pediatric pathology, who had been a consultant in the VanDerSluys case.

"You may have a serial killer in Syracuse," she told the prosecutor in giving him a copy of an October 1972 article in *Pediatrics* (1972;50(4)) called "Prolonged Apnea and the Sudden Infant Death Syndrome: Clinical and Laboratory Observations." In the report Dr. Steinschneider described his work with the syndrome and how two children in a family plagued with the affliction had died within hours of their release from his Syracuse research project.

In his paper, Dr. Steinschneider concluded that the family, which he still identifies only as "H," showed that victims suffered from real if almost undetectable physical abnormalities. In a proposal that was radical then but is now accepted, he suggested that the syndrome had a genetic component and was therefore inherited. He suggested that scientists could identify the abnormalities and thereby devise a warning system.

"But the paper indicated a more sinister possibility to Dr. John F. Hick of Minnesota. In a letter to the journal, he wrote that the case offered "circumstantial evidence suggesting a critical role for the mother in the death of her children." (See below.)

But his warning was dismissed, until Mr. Fitzpatrick read the paper 15 years later.

"The medical records described two happy, healthy, perfectly normal kids," he said. "It convinced me that these children were murdered."

Gruson, L, *The New York Times*, March 29, 1994.

### Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and Child Abuse

Letter To the Editor. *Pediatrics* 1973;51:147.

In reporting two siblings who succumbed to "sudden infant death syndrome," Steinschneider exposes an unparalleled family chronicle of infant death.<sup>1</sup> Of five children, four died in early infancy and the other died without explanation at age 28 months. Prolonged apnea is proposed as the common denominator in the deaths, yet the author leaves many questions relevant to the fate of these children unanswered.

Hick, J.F., M.D., Winona, MN

### Woman Confesses in Deaths of Children

Waneta E. Hoyte said her five children died because they cried.

"In a signed confession, she said she smothered her children, Erik, James, Julie, Molly and Noah, because their screaming made her feel useless.

"It was the thing that caused me to kill them all because I didn't know what to do for them," Mrs. Hoyt said in a confession taken by investigators hours before her arrest last week on five counts of murder.

The statement, one of two provided to investigators by Mrs. Hoyt, transformed what had been a textbook case of so-called crib death of her five children more than 20 years ago into another kind of family cataclysm: an unthinkable crime . . ." Mrs. Hoyt now renounces the confession. She now claims she signed the statements only to stop questioning by police.

Gruson, L, *The New York Times*, March 31, 1994.

Noted by J.F.L., MD

*Editor's Note:* This is an incredible story. The whole apnea home monitoring to prevent SIDS movement began with Steinschneider's original paper.

### REFERENCE

1. Steinschneider A. Prolonged apnea and the sudden infant death syndrome: clinical and laboratory observations. *Pediatrics*. 1972;50:646

**PROLONGED APNEA AND THE SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME:  
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Alfred Steinschneider  
*Pediatrics* 1994;93:944

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