

Holmgren to be sentenced in '95

By JANET BAINE
Staff writer

The doctor who performed the autopsy on six-month-old Daniel Spencer said the baby was shaken vigorously on two different occasions, causing him to die.

Dr. Chitra Rao, a general pathologist at Hamilton General Hospital who specializes in infant deaths, testified at the trial of Heather Holmgren, 32, of Acton.

Holmgren has already pleaded guilty to manslaughter in the January 1993 death of Daniel and to aggravated assault of a baby girl two months later. The baby girl also suffered from shaken baby syndrome, but recovered.

Holmgren's lawyer Peter West said that Holmgren changed her plea from not guilty to guilty after her mother told West that when Holmgren found Daniel was having difficulty breathing, she called 911 and then immediately called her

mother. Holmgren told her mother she left Daniel momentarily to get a bottle for him, and when she returned, she called his name, picked him up and shook him to try and revive him, West said.

Holmgren had initially forgotten about this conversation with her mother, but once she heard it, she recalled these events, West said. However, she has no memory of any previous episodes of shaking, either that day or two weeks before when Daniel was admitted to Guelph General Hospital with symptoms common in shaken baby syndrome, but which were not correctly diagnosed.

"She doesn't dispute the medical evidence but has no recollection of the two prior episodes of shaking either Daniel or the other baby," West said.

Rao testified that there were no external signs of injury on Daniel's head and tests revealed he hasn't come into contact with any biological or viral infection within the past ten days to explain his illness.

She did find evidence of bleeding within his retinas and within the brain. Rao said the injury had caused his brain to swell to the point where she found brain tissue in his spinal canal.

There are several reasons why babies are subject to severe injury

from vigorous shaking, she said. Their heads are relatively large in comparison to their bodies, they have weak neck muscles, their skull bones are soft and there is a higher water content, she said.

"The shaking would have been done with vigor and repetition. It was a force quite considerable, not like normal playing with a child," Rao said. "In order to have such an injury, the baby had to be shaken quite considerably with significant force."

Under cross-examination by Assistant Crown Attorney James Cornish, Rao said she could not say the duration of the shaking which may have been only two shakes, back and forth. Rao could not describe that force more clearly, because it isn't ethical to carry out experiments to find out, said Cornish. Rao said that the shaking would have taken place before Daniel appeared to become lifeless.

Two days have been set aside for sentencing in January, because the defence and prosecution have differing opinions on what the sentence should be.

"The sentence for manslaughter can be anything from no jail to life in prison," West said.

For now, Holmgren is out on bail and is not permitted to spend time alone with her 2-year-old daughter.

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Police Blotter

Cleaveholm break-in

Someone broke into a Cleaveholm Dr. residence on Monday afternoon and made off with \$3,500 worth of goods. These include some CDs, a CD player, some running shoes, jewelry and cash. There were no signs of forced entry, police said.

Cedarvale break-in

Also on Monday during the day, someone broke into a home on Cedarvale Ct. in Georgetown. A sliding glass window at the back of the house appeared to have been used to get inside. Some jewelry, CDs and liquor, worth about \$4,000, were taken.

Window broken

Four youths were seen in the area of the GO Transit access tunnel on Sunday at 8 p.m. when a window, worth about \$500 was broken, police said. They have not yet been able to identify the youths.

Arresting officers arrive in taxi

Halton Regional Police took a taxi to a house party where they arrested four Mississauga youths Monday night.

The charges were laid after an accident at 8:30 p.m. on Winston Churchill Rd., south of 10 Sideroad. Police said a 1992 Dodge van, which had been reported stolen from Mississauga, left the road and struck a large boulder.

Someone found the van still running with no one inside, but a neighbor saw four youths leaving the area. The youths had called for a taxi and took it to a nearby house which they had been visiting, police said.

Halton police were called to the scene, and decided to take the same taxi to the house "rather than arrive in police cars and give themselves away," according to Det. Sgt. Ron Welsh.

A 16-year-old driver was charged with dangerous driving causing bodily harm, possession of a stolen vehicle and breach of probation. The three other youths were charged with possession over \$1,000 and one faces an additional charge of breach of probation. The van was totalled in the accident. Police believe it was also involved in a drive-off, when gas was purchased but not paid for.

One youth was admitted to Georgetown Hospital.

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Topic: Stress and Exercise

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Tooth Chatter

by
ALEX
TRENTON
DENTURIST



DENTURES AND YOU

Today, despite great advances in dentistry, there are still a large number of people, mainly seniors, wearing full or partial dentures. In fact, today, more than five million Canadians adults are wearing dentures. That is more than one out of every four people in Canada. So wearing dentures is really quite common. And when approached with a positive attitude, dentures can become as natural as putting on your shoes in the morning and taking them off at night.

The mouth is one of the most important areas of your body, but often neglected when dentures are or should be worn. Your dentures should be checked yearly to prevent serious health conditions such as oral cancer, digestive disorders, headaches, and hearing problems. Because your gums are constantly shrinking, overclosing jaws can be the cause of many problems. Self help products, such as drug store liners are not only temporary solutions, but more importantly can be hazardous to your health and should not be used.

The supporting bone and tissue in your mouth needs regular rest from your dentures. You should take your dentures out every day for a brief time, preferably over night. Brush your gums and tongue with a soft toothbrush, to generate blood flow into the area and to remove residual food particles. You should rinse your mouth as well. Plain water, mouthwash or salt water can be used. Salt water is not recommended for low sodium diets or for people who are avoiding salt for health reasons.



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