

Vaccines ‘did not kill twins’

By James Rougvie

The Scotsman, Sept 21, 1985

Pathologists told a public inquiry at Cupar yesterday into the deaths of five-month-old twin boys at their home in June that vaccines given to the boys hours before they died were not to blame.

Dr Archibald Bain, pathologist at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Edinburgh, who carried out post-mortem examinations, said nothing had been found bacteriologically nor in tissue samples. "it is my considered opinion that this must be regarded as an instance of the sudden infant death syndrome (cot death), and that there is to date no pathological or scientific evidence to prove any direct relationship of death with recent vaccination."

Neil and Michael Clark died in June 26 at Cast Farm, Leuchars, a few hours after they were vaccinated against diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough and given oral polio immunisation.

Their mother, Mrs Ellen Clark (31), said that although both boys had been in hospital briefly earlier that year, they were well and had not suffered any ill effects from vaccinations in May. After their injections at St Andrews health centre in June, Michael had cried quite a lot 'but apart from that, there had been nothing significant.

She had put them in their prams at 1:10 pm and had looked at them just after 2 pm. Neil had no colour and she knew something was wrong.

Mrs Clark broke down when she said the family doctor told her that the twins were dead.

Dr Janet Mills, the family doctor, said the vaccines, were given in the normal manner and she had no reason to be uneasy. Both boys were well and It was her opinion they had died from what was called' sudden Infant death syndrome, the cause of which was unexplained.

Dr Bain said no one had proved any direct relationship between cot deaths and vaccinations. There was no positive proof in surveys which had been conducted in this country or the US. Cot death was the death of a young child unexplained by history

and for which a thorough post-mortem examination failed to reveal an adequate cause. There were 40 to 50 such deaths each year in the South of Scotland.

Asked by Mr Ralph Brown, the procurator-fiscal, if he thought there was anything sinister in the fact the children had died almost at the same time almost immediately after vaccination, Dr. Bain said it might have been sheer chance and they might have died in any case. It was not unknown for this to happen. He was very much in favour of continuation of the vaccination programme, since he had seen children die many years ago from whooping cough.

Sheriff McInness asked if the doctor was saying the boys might have died without the vaccine, would it be correct to infer that if they had not been vaccinated, they might not have died.

"That is very difficult, I prefer to put it the other a round," he replied. He said it had been estimated that every month or so in Britain a death occurred purely chance within 24 hours of a vaccination.

Dr William Irving, of department of pathology" at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary said tests showed an allergy level well within the normal range with no sign of immune deficiencies.

Dr Ian Smith, pathologist and consultant paediatrician at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children said he had found that Neil had brain damage, which

dated from birth and which would have shown in later life and which could have affected the respiratory muscles and later developed into epilepsy.

There were, he said, several risk factors operating which were known to be associated with cot death. The first was that the boys were twins, with a lower than normal birth weight, not markedly, but enough to put them at twice the risk of that of a single child; one was brain damaged and the other had a slow heart rare; and although Michael's development had caught up,

Neil was was not in general progressing as well. But what caused death, he said, was still an enigma.

At this point, the twins father, Mr Alex Clark stood up in court in the public benches and said he believed the boys were perfect and they had never suspected Neil was brain-damaged. He had appeared to be bright and alert.

Dr Frank Sheffield, head of the bacteriological products division of the National Institute for Biological Standards of Control in London, said the vaccines had been tested before they were released for use and then tested again when returned after the incident. "There is no way we can suggest there was anything unsatisfactory," he said.

Sheriff McInnes said he would issue a written determination as soon as possible.