

Child's Dental Chair Death Ruled Homicide

Civil Lawsuit Settled With Parents

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ANTIOCH, Calif. -- The death of a 3-year-old while he was undergoing a dental procedure was a homicide, ruled the Sacramento County Coroner.

The California Dental Board and the district attorney are now investigating the circumstances of how the boy died last summer in the dental office, reported KCRA-TV in Sacramento.

A dentist who conducted the procedure, William Martin Nielsen, has been practicing and treating patients at his Antioch, Calif., office during the six months since the death of 3-year-old Rogelio Campos-Crespo, of Brentwood, Calif.

According to authorities, the little boy was being prepped to have crowns placed on decaying teeth when something went wrong.

The Sacramento County Coroner's report said that "the decedent's nose and mouth were covered by the dentist's hand to calm him, while a 4-by-4 gauze pad or sponge ... was left behind in the mouth," which caused him to smother and likely choke on the gauze pad during the dental procedure. The pad had been left behind in the mouth and acted as a gag, according to the report.

The child's parents filed a wrongful death lawsuit in Contra Costa County, alleging negligence. They said the dentist violated the standard of care in a number of ways -- including administering anesthesia without closely monitoring the patient and without having personnel certified in basic life support, and by covering the mouth and nose when the child was having respiratory distress or cardiac arrest.

The case was settled out of court, and the agreement is confidential. Rogelio's parents cannot talk about the case or settlement.

Meanwhile, the district attorney could pursue criminal charges, and the state could act on the dentist's license.

Nielsen has been licensed to practice for more than 30 years in California. He has had no disciplinary action. He did not return a call from KCRA this week.

The dental board is investigating the case and will discuss with the attorney general whether to suspend or revoke Nielsen's license, or take no action.

The dentist has a special license to perform oral sedation, but the civil lawsuit alleges that he didn't have the right equipment and his people didn't have the right training to do the procedure.

The district attorney expects to get the case later this week and determine if criminal charges are warranted.