

Pro-Life News in Brief

By Liz Townsend

Haleigh Poutre Continues to Improve

Haleigh Poutre, the 12-year-old abused girl who was almost taken off life support by Massachusetts officials, is improving and can even say a few words, according to The Republican.

Haleigh's grandmother, Sandra Sudyka, told the newspaper that when she saw her last on July 18, "She was doing well. She was bright-eyed and smiling. She is always responsive to us."

Haleigh suffered a severe head injury September 11, 2005, allegedly at the hands of her adoptive mother and stepfather. She was brought to the hospital with severe injuries: broken teeth, swollen face, burns on her chest, sunken abdomen, cuts and sores, and a temperature of 81 degrees, according to the New York Times. The most brutal injury was to her brain stem, which was partly sheared.

The state Department of Social Services (DSS) received authorization to remove Haleigh's feeding tube and ventilator January 17 from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, the Boston Herald reported. However, the order was stayed when Haleigh showed signs of consciousness the next day.

She was transferred January 26 to Franciscan Hospital for Children in Boston, where she still resides. Sudyka and Haleigh's biological mother, Allison Avrett, have been allowed to visit Haleigh a few times since then.

Sudyka said Haleigh spoke her first words to them in June. "I was saying to her 'I love you,' and she was trying to say 'love' and it came out as a vibration... 'ove,'" Sudyka told The Republican.

In July, when they asked her what they could bring to the next visit, "She put her arms up (as if) to say, 'I don't know,'" Sudyka said, according to The Republican. Haleigh said "no" when they asked if she wanted a book.

Sudyka said she told Haleigh, "Before I know it, I am going to walk in here and you are going to say 'hello.'" Haleigh answered, "'ello," Sudyka told The Republican.

Haleigh remains in the custody of the state. Her adoptive mother, Avrett's sister Holli Strickland, died with her grandmother September 22 in an apparent murder-suicide. Haleigh's stepfather, Jason Strickland, who never formally adopted her, pled not guilty August 8 to six assault and battery charges, according to the Associated Press. Strickland is out on bail, and his next court hearing is scheduled for September 29.

Chinese Crusader against Forced Abortions Sentenced to Jail

Chen Guangcheng, a blind activist who filed a class-action lawsuit against authorities in Shandong province because of their forced abortion and sterilization program, was sentenced August 24 to four years in prison for “intentionally damaging property and organising a mob to disrupt traffic,” according to the South China Morning Post.

Chen’s lawyers filed an appeal September 4, calling his August 18 trial “unlawful,” the Morning Post reported. On the night before the trial, three of the lawyers were accused of stealing a wallet and held at a police station for hours. The lead attorney, Xu Zhiyong, was held for 22 hours, released only after the trial had ended, according to the Los Angeles Times.

“The authorities appointed two lawyers to represent Guangcheng, but all they said in the court was, ‘We have no objection,’” Chen’s brother Guangfu told the Morning Post. “That was all they said.”

The incidents for which Chen was convicted occurred when he was under house arrest in the village of Dongshigu in Shandong province, the Associated Press (AP) reported. Supporters told the AP that Chen and his family had been “repeatedly beaten, threatened, and confined to their house” since August 2005.

In February, a villager clashed with one of the guards watching Chen’s house, according to the Los Angeles Times. The villager was arrested, and his grandmother collapsed when officials wouldn’t release him. Other villagers got involved in protest and smashed windows on official vehicles. Chen Guangcheng was charged with destroying the property, even though he was confined to his house.

“All the villagers know what happened,” Chen Guangfu told the Times. “It has nothing to do with my brother. But the lawyers are not allowed to go to our village to gather any evidence.”

After this incident, Chen Guangcheng left his house secretly and stayed with another villager for 20 days, the Times reported. When officials allegedly beat the villager for hiding him, Chen left the house to walk to an official’s office. About 60 guards followed Chen, trying to stop him.

“They charged my brother with blocking traffic, but most of the people doing the blocking were their own men,” Chen Guangfu told the Times.

Chen, 35, was named one of the “Top 100 People Who Shape Our World” by Time magazine in April. His advocacy on behalf of women and men forced to abort their children or be sterilized if they already have one child led the State Family Planning Commission in Beijing to announce that Shandong authorities violated the law, which officially bans such practices, according to the Morning Post.

However, when local officials confined Chen, charged him with crimes, and convicted him without the presence of his lawyers, “Beijing gave him no help,” Morning Post columnist Frank Ching wrote. “The whole episode is a travesty of justice. The central government no doubt knows that what Chen is guilty of is no more than standing up for his rights and the rights of others in his community. By allowing him to be subjected to this farcical trial, the government is exposing China to international ridicule.”

Soccer Stars Saving Umbilical Cord Cells for the Future

British soccer players are following a new celebrity trend—freezing their children’s umbilical cord cells to treat future sports injuries and medical conditions, the London Sunday Times reported.

“We decided to store our new baby’s stem cells for possible future therapeutic reasons, both for our children and possibly for myself,” one Premier League “footballer” told the Times. “As a footballer, if you’re prone to injury it can mean the end of your career, so having your stem cells—a repair kit if you like—on hand makes sense.”

More than 11,000 parents in Britain have paid up to 1,500 pounds (\$2,837) for the cells to be stored at seven commercial stem cell banks in the country, the Times reported.

One of the banks, CryoGenesis International (CGI), has stored umbilical cord cells from the children of five footballers. The technology is currently being developed for the cells to treat damaged cartilage and ligaments. “This has been carried out experimentally,” Paul Griffiths, managing director of CGI, told the Times. “The stem cells are injected directly into the knee and because they have the same genetic code they start rebuilding.”

Griffiths told the Daily Post that other athletes and celebrities have stored cells at CGI. “Eighty diseases can now be treated by stem cells,” he said. “There is absolutely no controversy. We don’t take embryonic stem cells, we use umbilical cord stem cells—those samples can change children’s lives, yet they are thrown away. The company was set up to save as many children as we can.”

Australian Abortionist Convicted for Illegal Abortion

In the first such case in 25 years, Australian abortionist Suman Sood was convicted August 23 of illegally giving abortion-inducing drugs to a woman who delivered the baby into a toilet. Sood could face up to 10 years in prison when she is sentenced September 15, according to the Australian Associated Press (AAP).

The jury acquitted Sood of a manslaughter charge because of conflicting evidence about whether the baby was born alive. However, doctors had reported that the baby, aborted at 23 weeks, was taking gasping breaths when he was brought to the hospital after birth, The Australian reported. They could see a heartbeat through his skin, but could not detect it through a stethoscope.

Sood surrendered her New South Wales (NSW) medical license August 31. She stated that she has “voluntarily withdrawn her name from the Medical Register of NSW ... and apologised for any inconvenience caused to her patients as a result of the withdrawal,” according to AAP.

The state Medical Board had investigated Sood five times for accusations of unprofessional conduct, and she was sued by six women who eventually settled their cases out of court, AAP reported.

The most recent case occurred in May 2002, when the unidentified woman came to Sood’s Australian Women’s Health Clinic for an abortion. Although other abortionists had refused to give her an abortion because she was so far along in pregnancy, the woman testified that Sood gave her pills both orally and vaginally, telling her they would “make the baby come out easier” and told her to return the next day, according to the Daily Telegraph.

During the night the woman had severe abdominal pains and called Sood, who told her to take pain medication, the Daily Telegraph reported. At about 3 a.m. the woman delivered the 23-

week-old baby at her home, but the baby boy died at 8 a.m. after they were taken to the hospital.

Although a 1900 Australian law established that anyone who provides drugs or uses an instrument for an abortion can face up to 10 years in prison, a 1971 court decision allowed abortions if a doctor decides that the abortion is needed to preserve a woman's life or physical or mental health, AAP reported.

Prosecutors contended that Sood performed an illegal abortion because she neglected to "examine the patient or question her about her medical, social or economic circumstances or why she wanted the abortion," according to The Australian.

Second Alabama Abortion Clinic Closed This Year

For the second time in 2006, the Alabama Department of Public Health has suspended the license of an abortion clinic as the first step to shutting it down. Reproductive Health Services in Montgomery has until September 18 to either fix the violations or have its license revoked, according to the Associated Press (AP).

The department alleged that Reproductive Health Services violated several provisions in state law, including not having a backup physician for over a year, failing to keep proper documentation of patient complications, having an inaccessible emergency drug box, and keeping outdated or mislabeled medications, the AP reported.

In one case, a woman suffering from severe pain and abdominal cramping needed emergency room care July 14 after an abortion. She told doctors that Reproductive Health Services personnel told her that all of its doctors were out of town and that the complications were her problem, according to the AP.

"It's not OK to operate a health care facility that does surgery and then say 'We're going to put them off on the emergency system,'" Rick Harris, director of health department's Bureau of Health Provider Standards, told the AP.

Another Alabama abortion clinic, Summit Medical Center in Birmingham, closed permanently after it surrendered its license June 14, the Montgomery Advertiser reported. The health department had suspended its operations May 17, citing "multiple and serious violations of the rules," according to the Birmingham News.

The department detailed one case in which a woman had delivered a "stillborn, macerated, six pound, four ounce baby" in February after staff at Summit Medical Center gave her RU486 and a prostaglandin despite the fact that she was late in her third trimester of pregnancy, the News reported.

The recent closings came after the abortion clinics were investigated for the first time in several years, the Advertiser reported. Health officer Don Williamson said that the state will increase the frequency of investigations at the eight remaining abortion clinics in Alabama because of the extent of violations found.

"Abortion clinics haven't been a priority because there isn't a federal law that requires frequent inspections," Williamson told the Advertiser. "But now we're going to put them at a high priority, equivalent to nursing homes. It's a focused activity driven from what we've uncovered at Summit and the one here in Montgomery."

Cold Air May Prevent Brain Injury Recovery

A theory proposed in the August Medical Science Monitor contends that cold air provided to brain-injured patients through their breathing tubes may prevent their recovery and send them into so-called vegetative states.

George P. Ford of the Institute for the Minimally Conscious and David C. Reardon of the Elliott Institute described the case of a 53-year-old woman who was given air cooled to 63 degrees Fahrenheit after she slipped into a coma due to cardiac arrest. "It was hypothesized that bypassing the upper respiratory system with oxygen below body temperature might cause localized hypothermia of the lungs, heart, and brain even though the patient's rectal body temperature was in a normal range," they wrote.

The tube was removed and she was able to breathe on her own, no longer receiving the cold air. One month later, she began to speak occasionally and was no longer considered to be in a vegetative state.

"Even a small drop in brain temperature can disturb the neurochemistry of the brain, and this could be a factor in keeping or even causing a vegetative state," Reardon told HealthDay News. "And this case showed that by restoring normal upper respiratory tract warming—simply by removing the respirator—brain functioning may improve."

Although one case is not enough to draw definitive conclusions, Ford and Reardon recommended that more research should be done to check the theory. They also suggested that nebulizers used to deliver air be heated to a temperature closer to the normal levels for the upper respiratory tract and that patients with a breathing tube be checked periodically to allow them to breathe on their own as soon as possible.

"The case we looked at was an isolated case," Reardon told HealthDay News. "However, there are plenty of opportunities for further research and we're optimistic that a lot more can be known about this right away. And it's a fairly simple thing to adjust and take care of."