

The Case of Mary Tunell

Mary Tunell was a beloved mother and daughter who died suddenly and under suspicious circumstances at the Spectrum Health-Butterworth Campus in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on November 1, 2005.

Family members immediately agreed to have a complete, independent autopsy performed to determine Mary's cause of death and manner of death.

What really happened to Mary?

On October 22, 2005, Mary Tunell was admitted to the Spectrum Health-Butterworth Campus after experiencing some problems with her diabetes. Over the next several days, she started feeling better and appeared to be getting stronger. After a few days, doctors performed several tests and found that that Mary needed triple bypass surgery. A few more days then passed, and Mary suddenly started complaining that her hips "hurt really bad."

Despite the family's repeated requests for help and further testing, Mary's doctors did not investigate her complaints about not feeling well. After the second day of intense hip pain, Mary fell while walking back to her hospital bed. Family members suspected something was seriously wrong, and again insisted to Spectrum Health staff that something be done. Blood tests were finally ordered, and revealed that Mary's hemoglobin level had dropped. Mary was told that she was bleeding internally in the back of her abdomen and lower back. Family members were frustrated and immediately questioned how Mary's hemoglobin could have dropped so low, so suddenly.

Mary's doctors immediately postponed her triple bypass surgery because of this new development. Then, Mary suddenly developed pneumonia -- (or so the family was told) -- which postponed her triple bypass surgery again.

By the end of October, Mary had started feeling better. On the morning of November 1, Mary told family members who were visiting that she felt great. She was talkative and moving around in her room. One of her doctors stopped by to check on her, and told her that her triple bypass surgery would be performed within the next several days. He also told her she would be home by the end of the next week. Family members were ecstatic.

Some of Mary's family members stayed with her throughout most of the entire day, noting that she looked great and appeared to be doing fine. Shortly after 4 p.m., however, after family members had left for a short break, Mary's condition suddenly deteriorated. The entire family was then gathered into a nearby room where two doctors told them that Mary had suddenly developed a blood clot in her lung. Doctors told the family that they could no longer perform the triple bypass surgery, because Mary was too weak. In fact, doctors said they didn't think that Mary was going to make it.

By the time Mary's family was finally allowed back in her room, they were shocked at the drastic change in her physical appearance. Her entire body was bloated, and her color was deep purple. Within five minutes of seeing her, Mary died. Family members were in

disbelief, and agreed with Mary's doctors that a complete autopsy was needed to determine Mary's cause of death.

A few days after Mary passed away, her family received an alarming phone call from Spectrum Health staff. Staff told them that no blood clot had ever been found, according to Mary's autopsy report. Yet, Mary's attending physician had listed a blood clot to the lung as Mary's official cause of death on her death certificate. This only made Mary's family even more suspicious about what had really happened to her in that hospital room on November 1, 2005.

For months, the Tunell family has tried to obtain a certified copy of Mary's complete autopsy report from both Spectrum Health and the Kent County Medical Examiner's Office. To date, these repeated attempts to obtain the complete, certified autopsy report have been unsuccessful. Family members were informed by Spectrum Health that the only way they could obtain a copy of Mary's autopsy report was if they opened up a Probate Estate (even though there was no legal reason for them to do so.)

A copy of Mary's autopsy report was sent to a family physician, but as of this date, he has refused to share it with the family.

To date, Kent County officials continue to "claim" that Mary Tunell's complete, certified autopsy report is not on file at the County Medical Examiner's Office -- and that it is not a public document. Mary Tunell's cause of death and manner of death remain unknown.