

No Pain in Lethal Injection
Dudley Sharp, Justice Matters

The evidence, including the immediate autopsy of executed serial murderer/rapist Michael Ross, at bottom, supports that there is no pain within the lethal injection process.

The alleged concern is that some inmates may have been conscious, but paralyzed, during execution, because one of the three drugs used may have worn off, prior to death.

An Associated Press reporter correctly stated that "there is little to support those claims except a few anecdotes of inmates gasping and convulsing and an article in the British medical journal Lancet." (AP, "Death penalty foes attack lethal-injection drug", 7/5/05)

The British Medical Journal, The Lancet, published an article critical of lethal injection. The article did not/could not identify one case where evidence existed that an inmate was conscious during execution.

The Lancet article identified 21 cases of execution where the level of "post mortem" (after death) sodium thiopental was below that used in surgery and, therefore, may suggest consciousness was possible.

A more accurate description would be all but impossible.

A post mortem measurement of sodium thiopental is very different from a moment of death measurement.

Dr. Lydia Conlay, chair of the department of anesthesiology, Baylor College of Medicine (Texas Medical Center, Houston) said the extrapolation of postmortem sodium thiopental levels in the blood to those at the time of execution is by no means a proven method. "I just don't think we can draw any conclusions from (the Lancet study) , one way or the other."

The Lancet article did not dispute the obvious -- that the sodium thiopental levels are much, much higher during the execution, because the dosages administered are so huge - roughly 10 times the dosage necessary for sedation unconsciousness during surgical procedures.

Unconsciousness occurs within the first 30 seconds of the injection/execution process. The injection of the three drugs takes from 4-5 minutes. Death usually occurs within 6-7 minutes and is pronounced within 8-9 minutes.

The researchers also failed to note the much lower probability (impossibility?) that the murderer could be conscious, while all three drugs are coursing through the veins, concurrently.

Despite the Lancet article's presumptions and omissions, there is no scientific evidence that consciousness could occur with the amounts and methods of injecting those three drugs within the execution period.

The AP article also stated that "They (death penalty opponents) also attack lethal injection by saying that the steps to complete it haven't been reviewed by medical professionals."

Obviously, untrue.

Intravenous application of medication has been successfully used for many, many decades.

The chemicals used in lethal injection, as well as their individual and collective results, at the dosages used, are also well known.

Furthermore, lethal injection is not a medical procedure. It is the culmination of a judicial sentence carried out by criminal justice professionals, the result of which is intended as death, the outcome of every case.

Some Reality

From Harford Courant, "Ross Autopsy Stirs Execution Debate----Results Cited To Counter Talk Of Pre-Death Pain", August 11, 2005

The below is a paraphrase of parts of that article, including some exact quotes.

Results of the autopsy done on serial killer Michael Ross are being cited by several prominent doctors to refute a highly publicized article that appeared in The Lancet, the British medical journal, in April, 2005.

Critics of the Lancet article say it does not account for postmortem redistribution of the anesthetic - thiopental. The redistribution, the critics say, accounts for the lower levels of thiopental on which Dr. Koniaris based his Lancet article conclusions that the levels of anesthetic were inadequate. The Ross autopsy results document this redistribution, bolstering the critics' assertions.

Dr. H. Wayne Carver II, Connecticut's chief medical examiner, was aware of the controversial Lancet article before performing the Ross autopsy. As a result, he took the additional step of drawing a sample of Ross's blood 20 minutes after he was pronounced dead at 2:25 a.m. May 13. Carver took a subsequent sample during the autopsy, which began about 7 hours later, at 9:40 a.m.

The 1st sample showed a concentration of 29.6 milligrams per liter of thiopental; the second sample showed a concentration of 9.4 milligrams per liter. The 1st sample was drawn from Ross' right femoral artery, and the second from his heart, which can account for some of the discrepancy. But Dr. Mark Heath, a New York anesthesiologist and one of the numerous doctors who have signed letters to The Lancet challenging the Koniaris article, said it clearly substantiates the postmortem redistribution of the thiopental.

Dr. Jonathan Groner, a pediatric surgeon from Ohio said he interviewed a number of forensic toxicologists before adopting the view that thiopental in a corpse leaves the blood and is absorbed by the fat, causing blood samples taken hours after death to be an unreliable marker of the levels of thiopental in the body at the time of death.

Groner described the Ross autopsy results as "a powerful refutation" of the Lancet-Koniaris study.

Dr. Ashraf Mozayani, a forensic toxicologist with the Harris County Medical Examiner's Office in Texas, said the level of thiopental "drops quite a bit" after death. Even in the living, Mozayani said, thiopental levels decline rapidly after administration of the drug. She cited one study in which a patient was administered 400 milligrams of thiopental intravenously. After two minutes the concentration in the blood was measured at 28 milligrams, but dropped to 3 milligrams concentration 19 minutes after the anesthetic was injected.

Mozayani said the declining concentration of thiopental cited in the Ross autopsy report "make sense."

On The Lancet article, she said, "I don't think they have the whole story - the postmortem redistribution and all the other things they have to consider for postmortem testing."

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Mr. Sharp has appeared on ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX, NBC, NPR, PBS, BBC and many other TV and radio networks, on such programs as Nightline, The News Hour with Jim Lehrer, The O'Reilly Factor, etc., has been quoted in newspapers throughout the world and is a published author.

A former opponent of capital punishment, he has written and granted interviews about, testified on and debated the subject of the death penalty, extensively and internationally.

Pro death penalty sites

www.cjlf.org/deathpenalty/DPinformation.htm

<http://www.clarkprosecutor.org/html/links/dplinks.htm>

[www\(dot\)dpinfo.com/](http://www(dot)dpinfo.com/)

[http://joshmarquis.blogspot.com./](http://joshmarquis.blogspot.com/)

www.prodeathpenalty.com

<http://www.prodeathpenalty.org/>

<http://www.yesdeathpenalty.com/> (Sweden)

www.wesleylowe.com/cp.htmlwww.vuac.org/capital

