

DIFFERENTIATING SUDDEN INFANT DEATH SYNDROME FROM ASPHYXIA CASES AS PRACTICAL PROBLEM IN FORENSIC MEDICINE

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Sudden children deaths fit into “suspicious deaths” category. After emergency service or family doctor proved helpless, such cases are intensively investigated both by medical staff and law enforcement institutions, with help of forensic pathologists. Such situations demand full postmortem examination, including detailed autopsy and further laboratory tests of collected specimens. Diagnosis of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is established in situations when there is no available explanation for the death of a young child - practically an infant. As such, this diagnosis is used after the extensive efforts, aimed at eliminating all potential causes of death, have been done and proved to be futile. Differential diagnosis includes wide variety of conditions: from genetic disorders and developmental abnormalities, inborn illnesses, infections to accidents, criminal acts and iatrogenic complications. As in cases of SIDS there are no macroscopic, microscopic, biochemical or toxicological findings that would be typical and pointing clearly at the diagnosis - the cause of death is defined broadly as “functional failure of the cardiovascular and respiratory system”. Such a situation is considered by both medical physiology and forensic pathology specialists as failure and efforts are still made to form at least a working hypothesis explaining SIDS.