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## Baby doing well after forced transfusion

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By ANELISA KUBHEKA

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Durban - A KwaZulu-Natal infant who had been given an "extremely urgent" blood transfusion by doctors who obtained a high court order to allow the procedure, is now 6 months old and doing well.



File photo

The infant, from Empangeni, was born prematurely at 28 weeks, weighing 730g in November when his mother had to have an emergency caesarian section.

The child's pediatrician, Dr Tavengwa Usaiwevhu, said the infant was a bundle of joy and now weighed 4kg.

"I last saw the child in February and he is doing very well," he said.

According to papers filed in the High Court in Empangeni by Legal Aid SA on behalf of doctors at the Garden Clinic Hospital, the baby had been on cardio-respiratory support and an urgent blood transfusion was discussed with the parents.

They refused the procedure because it was against their beliefs as Jehova's Witnesses.

The court order giving authority to doctors at Garden Clinic to perform the transfusion was granted on November 15 and the baby had the transfusion on that day.

Usaiwevhu, who spoke to the Daily News this week, said the infant would not have survived if he had not had the transfusion.

"The transfusion was needed because most nutrients are transported in the blood from the mother to the child in the last 13 weeks of pregnancy and this infant didn't get this as he was premature," he said.

He said the baby had a low blood cell count and the number had been dropping daily.

Bhekisgcino Dladla, an elder at Klaarwater Jehovas Witness near Pinetown, said the child's parents were merely obeying the word of God.

"In (the Bible's book of) Proverbs it says promiscuity and worshipping man-made gods are an equal sin as taking blood through consumption or transfusion," he said.

Dladla in an interview this week said blood was life and could not be accepted to save your own because only God could do so.

"The sin is upon the doctors who gave the blood, and not the parents or the child."

In the application for the order to be granted, Mzochithwayo Ngcamu, a children's court practitioner with Legal Aid SA, said the application had been made on an urgent basis as any delay would have prejudiced the child's right to life.

"On November 13, in the afternoon, I received instructions to investigate a matter relating to a child who had been admitted in the Garden Clinic Hospital... On receipt of instructions, I telephoned the hospital. I was advised that there was a child who was very sick and I was also advised to speak to Dr Ladie (Dr Usaiwevhu)," the application read.

When Ngcamu went to the hospital, before the application was made, Ladie showed him a a text message sent by the child's father, saying there should be no blood transfusion owing to his religious beliefs.

"I was also advised by Dr Ladie that the father of the child came to the hospital on November 9 to confirm that there should be no blood transfusion," the application read.

"The father came with two elders from the church, as well as the paternal grandmother of the child."

While at the hospital, the child's father wrote a letter confirming that the family refused the transfusion; the letter was attached to the application papers.

In the letter, the father asked for any other available methods to be used on his child, and "not the blood transfusion".

In the application papers, Ngcamu wrote that the transfusion was "extremely urgent" as other means of saving the child's life would have no effect.

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"The child is unable to absorb the mother's milk and supplements cannot be used because of his tiny body. It is the blood transfusion which can save the life of the baby," the papers read.

Refusing consent

Ngcamu wrote that while at the hospital he saw the child was on life support.

"The doctors are unable to save the baby because the parents are refusing to give consent".

He submitted in the application that the parents' refusal to give consent for the procedure was an infringement on the child's right to life.

"I further submit that parents do not have a right to put the life of any innocent baby in danger because of their belief.

"The courts have said that while the parents' views had to be considered, their private beliefs could not be allowed to override the child's right to life. I submit that the religious beliefs of the parents are not that of the child," the application read.

The child's father refused to be interviewed.

Daily News



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