

Expert testifies baby may have died even with medical help

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OREGON CITY, Ore. - An expert on premature births said Friday a baby may have died anyway even if his faith-healing parents had called for medical help.

Dale and Shannon Hickman are members of the Followers of Christ Church and they're on trial

born son, David. They're charged with r

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Stanley Berry, an expert medical witness called by the Hickmans' defense team, testified the baby could have died even if he went to the hospital. He pointed to thousands of cases where babies were born with the same infection David had when he was born two months premature. He was born a year ago at Shannon Hickman's parents' house and died less than nine hours later.

No doctors were ever called by the Hickmans or anyone else at the home when the baby started having trouble breathing.

All of the people present, including three midwives, are members of the church that chooses prayer over medicine.

Witnesses for the prosecution testified earlier this week David's lungs were too weak to keep him alive. They said he had an infection too but even at two months premature he probably would have lived if someone called 911 and he got help breathing.

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But Berry, a Michigan doctor with 27 years of experience in treating sick newborns, testified David died from an infection called sepsis. He said the baby may have died even if he was taken to an area neonatal unit.

"They still lose babies. They still have babies that are septic who die in the nursery that they can't save," he said.

Berry later said that the three church midwives present did give medical advice to keep the baby warm. He testified the Hickmans had every reason to believe they were getting good advice from the midwives.

One of the prosecution's claims was that the Hickmans had plenty of time to call 911 and get help after they saw he had labored breathing. But Berry countered there likely was not enough time.

Lavona Keith, one of five midwives in the church, prayed with the Hickmans after their baby was born. She admitted she has no medical training and would never send a baby to a doctor even if it was dying.

s) giving him their poison," Keith said o
: to cut it open."

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The defense called Keith to show the couple was taking the advice of midwives before, during and after the birth of David a year ago.

She testified that under no circumstance would she ever call a doctor to save a sick or dying baby.

"I don't want to be rude or snotty or bratty, but I don't trust doctors, and I don't want them cutting on my baby," she said.

Past church members, like Myra Cunningham, have told KATU News that the church shuns members who do go to a doctor, including herself.

Keith said she knew of at least three church mothers who went to doctors to deliver their babies. She said it's just something that she and most church members choose not to do.

"Babies die in the hospitals all the time," she said.

More church members and possibly at least one more midwife are expected to take the stand when the trial resumes Monday.

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