

Mom Guilty Child-Injury By Unneeded Surgery

Spring mom guilty in child-injury trial

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By DALE LEZON

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A Spring woman faces possible life in prison after a Harris County jury determined Thursday that she caused her young son to have at least two unnecessary surgeries.

Laurie Williamson, 40, was convicted of injury to a child in connection with her son undergoing surgeries for implantation of a nerve-stimulation device and insertion of a gastric feeding button.

Testimony in the punishment phase of the trial began late Thursday and is scheduled to resume Tuesday.

Prosecutor Mike Trent said Williamson manipulated doctors and her son's condition to get the surgeries.

"Perpetrators of this type of child abuse are very clever," Trent said. "She was very knowledgeable about the medical system. She was a nurse's aide at one time. She simulated and fabricated the symptoms that appeared to make the surgeries necessary."

Munchausen syndrome

Defense attorney Allen Isbell, however, has said that Williamson was listening to doctors who advised that her son needed the procedures.

State child welfare officials and prosecutors have said Williamson has Munchausen syndrome by proxy, a rare disorder in which a person fabricates or induces symptoms in others to gain attention.

Isbell has denied that Williamson has the syndrome.

Prosecutors said that Williamson took her three children to at least 500 appointments with doctors during a 10-year period and that she

told the children they suffered from a rare illness and would not live past their teens.

When Child Protective Services took custody of the children in March 2006, officials said, they were malnourished. Two had feeding tubes and were in wheelchairs.

Expert witnesses for the prosecution testified during the trial that Williamson falsified her children's conditions.

A pediatric neurologist, Dr. Balbir Singh, testified that Williamson told him that her son was on anti-seizure medication, but was still having attacks. He would stare for minutes at a time and not respond to hearing his name or to touch, Singh said she told him. Other times he would whine.

'Still suffering'

Singh, who said he is trained to treat children for epilepsy, testified that two tests performed on the boy suggested that he could be susceptible to seizures. He said he referred Williamson to a surgeon for the nerve-stimulation surgery.

Trent said Williamson also fabricated her children's conditions to solicit money from organizations and people. He said she raised about \$150,000 between 2000 and 2005.

"She was not simply seeking gratification through attention," Trent said. "She was actively seeking donations for support."

Isbell denied the allegations.

"She did not try to benefit from either her or her children's illness," he said.

Williamson's son is 13 now. Her other two children are 11 and 8 years old.

Child welfare officials said they placed the children in the care of a relative, and their mother is not allowed any contact with them.

Officials said the children are physically fine. However, Trent said, they seem small for their ages.

"These kids are still suffering from that abuse today," he said.

Chronicle reporter Brian Rogers contributed.

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