



ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC SCIENCES

991 WIRE ROAD
AUBURN, ALABAMA 36830
(334) 844-4648

P.O. BOX 3510
AUBURN, ALABAMA 36831-3510
FACSIMILE (334) 887-7531

Abusive Head Injury

The concept of “whiplash shaken baby syndrome” was first introduced in the 1940s and there has been much research, publicity, and controversy regarding *Shaken Baby Syndrome* (SBS) ever since. Because it is considered a completely preventable cause of infant and child death, ACDRS has had a vested interest in the issue since its inception. In recent years, however, the terminology of SBS has been called into serious question. ACDRS learned just a couple of years ago that some prosecutors in Alabama were encountering difficulty prosecuting SBS perpetrators due to conflicting expert testimonies regarding the specifics of SBS and even the very existence of such a “syndrome.”

Almost ten years ago, the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on SBS. The Committee’s report discussed diagnostic indicators of shaking- and impact-related head injuries in infant and child fatalities, and differentiated between these injury mechanisms and the forces commonly encountered in routine infant/child activities and playing. But the lack of a uniform definition and the shortfalls of some of the terminology used were also apparent.

In May of 2009 the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a formal policy statement regarding *Abusive Head Trauma in Infants and Children*. AAP now recommends that the term *Abusive Head Trauma* be used instead of SBS. The medical community and others are following the lead of Medical Examiners across the nation who have abandoned the SBS terminology for the more accurately descriptive terms *Abusive Head Injury* and/or *Abusive Head Trauma*. ACDRS has already seen these changes in terminology in practical use and, as it becomes more universally accepted and understood; hopefully the aforementioned prosecutorial challenges regarding such cases will be resolved. Clearly the public has been made very familiar with the term Shaken Baby Syndrome by years of outreach and education efforts on the subject and the term will likely continue to be used in such efforts for that very reason, but in professional forensic and fatality review circles it has already been replaced in clinical use by Abusive Head Trauma.