

USA Today Exposes Florida Doctor Medically Kidnapping Children and Destroying Lives

By Brian Shilhavy | December 10, 2019

USA Today reporter Daphne Chen has **just published an article** on Dr. Sally Smith, a pediatrician who is the head of the child protection team in Pinellas County, Florida.

Published in the “Torn Apart” section of GateHouseNews.com, this article is reportedly the first in a series investigating Florida’s child welfare system.

Chen refers to Dr. Sally Smith as:

the 61-year-old pediatrician [who] is one of the most powerful figures in the child welfare system along Florida’s Gulf Coast.

As the head of the Pinellas County child protection team, Smith examines virtually every child funneled to All Children’s Hospital with suspicious injuries.

Among prosecutors, her word is like gold.

The USA Today Network reportedly investigated hundreds of Dr. Smith’s cases, and:

found more than a dozen instances where charges were dropped, parents were acquitted or caregivers had credible claims of innocence yet suffered irredeemable damage to their lives and reputations.



Vadim and Elina Kushnir celebrated the first birthday of their son William in July. Child abuse pediatrician Dr. Sally Smith accused them of egregiously abusing their son when he was 6 weeks old. Photo by Elina Kushnir – [Source](#).

Reporter Daphne Chen begins her article by recounting the story of Vadim and Elina Kushnir who claim Dr. Smith was responsible for the medical kidnapping of their newborn son, and his sister.

Elina went into labor on a scorching day in July.

It would be the second child for her and her husband, immigrants from Ukraine who ran a trucking business in Sarasota County. They picked out Western names: Adele for their rambunctious little girl. William for the child inside her belly, the son they had prayed for.

And so even though Elina wasn't dilated, even though she was afraid, when the nurses told her to push, Elina pushed.

Less than two hours later, William was born in a torrent of blood, his umbilical cord wrapped around his neck, his face blue. Bruises dotted his face and shoulders. For two weeks, he cried every time he was touched.

Their pediatrician reassured them their son had a traumatic birth and sensitive skin, but was otherwise healthy.

Then, when William was 33 days old, Elina noticed him twitching.

At Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg, doctors found bleeding in William's brain and two rib fractures.

The next day, Dr. Sally Smith came to examine him.

Elina and Vadim Kushnir say Smith did not introduce herself or answer the couple's questions. Instead, she took photos of every part of William's body, including his genitals and a bruise on his hand from the IV. On her way out, Smith turned to them.

"This is child abuse, and I'm going to prove it," she said, according to Vadim.

The Kushnirs had never heard of Smith. Few have.

Two weeks after Smith's cryptic visit, an investigator from the Department of Children and Families escorted the Kushnirs out of the hospital where they had kept sleepless vigil for weeks.

The department then took custody of William and his sister.

In family court, Smith claimed the Kushnirs subjected their son to egregious abuse. She said the mixture of old and new blood in William's brain proved he had been abused multiple times since birth. "Violent shaking would be one possibility," she said. "Slamming him on a bed 15 times would be another."

His rib fractures, she said, were two to three weeks old, caused by someone crushing his chest, according to DCF documents. Smith also claimed a "linear bruise" on William's arm indicated "high force blunt trauma with a long, linear object."

To the attorneys representing the Kushnirs, Smith's opinions came off as outlandish.

They said the “linear bruise” was in fact a small rash that Elina herself had shown to William’s pediatrician at a recent visit. According to court records, the pediatrician testified the rash was likely from the straps of William’s car seat and was so small that she would not have noticed it had Elina not pointed it out.

When defense attorneys asked whether birth trauma could have explained William’s injuries, Smith admitted she had only partially examined the birth records.

Even the imaging findings were in question. California radiologist Dr. Susan Gootnick argued that William’s hemorrhages were re-bleeds from birth trauma, not from shaking. In her report, Gootnick argued William’s rib fractures were closer to six weeks old — right around the time of his birth.

“The prosecution is looking at this case from the outside in when they should be looking at it from the inside out,” Gootnick said.

The judge sided with the Kushnirs, citing the state’s inconsistent testimony and failure to look into the circumstances of William’s birth.

She ordered William and Adele returned to their parents immediately.

“It was a nightmare,” said Vadim. “I understand they have to check it out. But I had a feeling she [Smith] just signed off everybody as child abuse.” ([Full Story here.](#))

Reporter Daphne Chen discusses other cases that involved Dr. Smith:

Beata Kowalski, a 43-year-old mother of two, died by suicide in 2017 after Smith accused her of Munchausen syndrome by proxy — a rare disorder in which a parent fakes a child’s illness for sympathy or gain. Her family members are now suing Smith and All Children’s Hospital for what they said were trumped-up claims.

John Stewart, a Marine Corps veteran, spent 300 days in jail on Smith’s allegation that he killed his girlfriend’s son by throwing him repeatedly against a soft surface. Prosecutors dropped the charges after a neuropathologist contradicted Smith’s findings, according to internal memos.

Tara Brown, 39, underwent three grueling rounds of in vitro fertilization to conceive twins with her physician husband. She was accused of inflicting countless fractures on her 6-week-old infants, but the charges were expunged after another doctor diagnosed them with a rare bone disorder.

“Sally Smith told me that if I didn’t tell them what was wrong, then my children would be put in foster care,” Brown said. “She looked us straight in the eye and said, ‘One of you is lying, one of you abused your children.’”

Read the full article at GateHouseNews.com

If you live in Florida and have been a victim of medical kidnapping, the Torn Apart editors are [collecting stories to potentially cover during their investigative series.](#)

Learn More About Child Abuse Pediatricians:

[Are New Pediatric “Child Abuse Specialists” Causing an Increase in Medical Kidnappings?](#)

[Child Abuse Pediatricians: An “Ethically Bankrupt” Profession that Destroys Families](#)

[History of Shaken Baby Theories Exposed: How an Elite Group of Pediatric Radiologists Started Medical Kidnapping in the 1940s](#)

[Elite Medical Doctors Seek to Control the Media and Public’s Perception of Child Abuse Specialists](#)

[Pediatric Child Abuse “Experts” are NOT Experts in Anything](#)

[Legal Experts: Shaken Baby Diagnosis Leads to “Destruction of Families Beyond Anything Comparable in the Modern History of the American Justice System”](#)

[Attorney: Child Abuse Pediatricians Aligned with Child Protective Services Destroy Innocent Families](#)

[Exposing How Child Abuse Pediatricians Medically Kidnap Children: A Guide for Parents](#)

[Study: In 96% of Shaken Baby Syndrome Cases Analyzed Infants Had Metabolic Bone Disorders](#)