

Authors' Response

Sir:

We appreciate the opportunity to see Dr. Heggtveit's case, and would also favor the opinion that some brain swelling was likely present prior to death. Our question is, why? In the absence of specific information as to the circumstances of the fire, or opinion offered as to the cause of the apparent skull fracture (e.g., inflicted, heat, postmortem), it is a matter of speculation as to the mechanism of brain tissue extrusion into the epidural space in this case.

Our reported case was clearly of postmortem cooking of the intact head with dura mater shrinkage causing brain extrusion into the epidural space. The information and illustrations provided by

Dr. Heggtveit raise more questions than answers. His case does provide an opportunity to reflect on the complex analysis required in such cases, as discussed in our article.

As Dr. Heggtveit's comments suggest, and we agree, when the totality of circumstances in a given case varies, so the specific mechanism(s) by which brain tissue finds its way with the epidural space may vary.

John M. Andrews, M.D.
Hideo H. Itabashi, M.D.
Department of Coroner
Los Angeles County
1104 N. Mission Road
Los Angeles, CA 90033