

Baby tooth DNA solves mystery death

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Australian scientists have used a keepsake baby tooth to solve the mystery of the death of a couple's 7-year-old daughter, 14 years after she died.

Scientists from the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research, the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and the Neurogenetics and Forensic Laboratories determined the girl died from Rett syndrome, a neurological disorder.

The researchers used a gene test on DNA extracted from the baby tooth to make the diagnosis.

Professor David Ravine, from WAIMR's Laboratory for Molecular Genetics and Dr. Helen Leonard, coordinator of the Australian Rett Syndrome Study, said confirming the diagnosis finally laid to rest many of the family's fears.

"Despite intensive investigation, the little girl's condition went undiagnosed by doctors all through her life, so the fact that the cause of her illness and death was finally pinpointed gave the family the information they needed to understand what had happened," said Ravine.

Leonard said the confirmation of a definite diagnosis erased years of worry for the family.

"Not knowing what was causing their daughter's illness, her parents began to wonder if they were somehow responsible."

A paper outlining the effort appears in The Lancet.

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