

Christian Faith-Healing Parents on Trial for Refusing Medical Attention

An Oregon couple has been accused of medically neglecting their baby daughter after refusing medical treatment for a large tumor that developed over her left eye. Opening statements were heard Friday at the Clackamas County Courthouse, and the trial will resume today.

Timothy and Rebecca Wyland, parents of 18-month-old Alayna, are members of the Followers of Christ, an unorthodox Christian group that rejects modern medicines and shuns those who seek medical attention.

The couple would not take their daughter to a doctor, preferring to anoint her with oils and lay their hands on her in prayer. The benign tumor, an abnormal buildup of blood vessels known as a hemangioma, started pushing Alayna's eyeball out of its socket. The growth, reportedly baseball-sized when she was six months old, could now cause blindness because it was left untreated for so long.

Timothy and Rebecca are facing criminal mistreatment charges and could go to prison for up to five years.

According to the Associated Press, prosecutor Christine Landers said Friday that Alayna's father "told a detective that 'sometimes God heals, and sometimes God lets children die'."

The couple's defense lawyer, John Neidig, said they "are loving parents who became victims of overzealous child welfare workers at the Oregon Department of Human Services," AP reports. He argued that the couple believed their child's tumor would shrink and vanish as she grew.

Alayna was taken from the Wylands last June and placed in foster care for two months while she received court-ordered medical treatment for her tumor. Although her condition has improved, she could continue to experience vision problems. Landers told AP that Alayna's left eye is still not properly set in its socket. The Wyland's daughter currently lives with them, but she remains under state custody, AP reports.

Rita Swan, co-founder of Children's Healthcare is a Legal Duty, has been involved in advocating for legislative changes in Oregon since the late 1990s. While the state used to protect those who refused medical treatment for their children because of their religious beliefs, the law now allows prosecution.

Swan's 16-month-old son, Matthew, died of meningitis because she and her husband were Christian Scientists and believed religious practitioners could heal him. They have since left the church.

"The parents are absolutely convinced that God is on their side," Swan told *The New York Times*. "Nevertheless, society should set forth the standard that children should be protected up until the age of 18. We just can't let people do whatever they want in the name of religion."

The Wylands are not the first Followers of Christ members on trial for refusing medical treatment.

In 2008, 2-year-old Ava Worthington died of bronchial pneumonia and a blood infection because her parents would not seek treatment. Her parents, Carl and Raylene Worthington, were criminally charged once Oregon changed its protection laws. They were acquitted of second-degree manslaughter in 2009, but Carl was convicted of criminal mistreatment and sentenced to 60 days in prison.

Three months after Ava's death, her grandparents, Jeff and Marci Beagley, refused to seek treatment for their 16-year-

old son, Neil; he died of complications from an untreated urinary tract blockage. The couple was convicted last year of criminally negligent homicide, and sentenced to 16 months in prison.

We believe God heals, but at what point do we take our children to the doctor? Sound off in the comment box below.