

## **An Extraordinary Case: Suicide with Insulin in a Grave Dug by the Victim Himself**

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**Summary.** The undressed body of a young man was discovered in a pit in a forest. The victim was a 27 year old depressed man, suffering from a severe diabetes. Besides personal objects, three empty insulin vials (400 I.U./vial) and empty ampules of distilled water, injection-needles and a syringe were also found in the pit. The investigation carried out at the scene, the questioning of his family and physicians, and the autopsy clarified this unusual case. In conclusion the hypothesis of “suicide” was maintained: the man administered himself a large doses of insulin; in hypoglycaemic coma he died from a bronchopneumonia in a “grave” dug by himself.

**Zusammenfassung.** Die Leiche eines Mannes wurde in einer bedeckten Grube gefunden. Das Opfer war ein 27 jähriger, unter Depressionen leidender, schwer zuckerkranker Mann. In der Grube lagen drei leere Ampullen Insulin (400 I.U. pro Ampulle) und destilliertes Wasser, Injektionsnadeln und eine Spritze. Die Ermittlung am Ort, die Vernehmung seiner Familie und seiner Ärzte, sowie die Autopsie gaben eine Erklärung für diesen ungewöhnlichen Vorfall. Die Hypothese, es sei Selbstmord gewesen, wurde aufrechterhalten: der junge Mann hatte sich eine große Dosis Insulin verabreicht und war im Coma an einer Lungenentzündung im „Grab“, das er sich selbst gegraben hatte, verstorben.

**Key words.** Suicide, with Insulin – Depression – Diabetes.

An extraordinary case of suicide was recorded in the Antwerp judicial area (Belgium).

In summer 1966 the body of a young man was discovered in a pit in a forest. This happened after one had found a shopping-bag hanging on the branch of a tree in the neighbourhood of the pit. This bag contained clothes, a purse, a medical card indicating that the man was a diabetic, and a prescription-form with the following text: “I apologize for the troubles I have caused you. I have always meant well, but things always go wrong”. Signed and dated.

On an other branch hung a piece of cardboard, also with a written text: “Mister. . . announces his death on. . . (probable date) at midnight. He has not died devoutly, but he has without wishes. On the contrary he realizes that his family is overcome with grief, but longer than one day is not desirable – hate such business”. Signed and dated.

The body was found approximately one week after this date. The pit was, except at the head, covered with boards, a plastic sail and leaf-soil. The head of the pit was only covered with a three-ply board. The pit was well dug out and had a length of 1,80 meters; width and depth were 70 centimeters.

In this pit the following objects were also found: a bible, a judo-girdle, a kimono, a towel, a washing-glove with a piece of soap, an handkerchief, a pair of socks, gloves, an identitycard and a pliable field-spade. A little plastic bag was laying at the footend. This bag contained three empty insuline vials (400 I.U./vial) and empty ampules of distilled water, injection-needles and a little syringe.

In one of the walls of the pit, at the head-side, stuck a half-opened clasp-knife on which hung a flash-light. The body was laying on its back and wore only a slip. At its right hand's wrist hung a bracelet with a name-plate. It was the body of a normally built, thin young man. It showed signs of decomposition, but was still recognizable. The back of the left hand and the left gluteal zone showed injection sites.

The autopsy and the microscopic examination revealed a confluent bronchopneumonia and an extensive fatty change of liver. The heart had patent coronary vessels and an undamaged myocard. The pancreas was autolysed. No suspicious traumatic lesions were diagnosed. The toxicologic examination turned out to be negative; no trace of insuline was found. Because of the decomposition the bloodsugar level was unreliable.

Finally it should be mentioned that the climate was extremely dry. The temperature in this period varied between 17 and 21 degrees Celsius maxima and 7 to 8 degrees minima.

The body could be identified very soon. This 27 year old, unmarried character-deranged laceman suffered from a heavy juvenile diabetes. He had repeatedly been hospitalized in comatose condition. Sometimes he injected too much insuline, sometimes he refused treatment. Due to all kinds of difficulties (disagreement with his family, dismissal by his employer etc.) and most of all because of his disease, this man was deeply depressed. He wrote letters and made poetry in which his depressive mood was clearly noticeable. The depressions became more acute, especially after he had come to the conviction that he suffered from a heart-disease as a result of "decalcification (!)" of his coronary vessels. Informing whether one could suspect an endogenous mental illness, the treating physicians answered negatively.

The very suggestive anamnesia, the leave-taking letters, the presence of personal belongings in the "grave", the absence of injuries caused by violence, were considered to be valid pieces of evidence to maintain the hypothesis of "suicide". Concerning the way of suicide one accepted the following theory: after the pit had been dug, and the above-mentioned "by-acts" had been carried out, and he had undressed, the man went down in the grave through the opening which he covered afterwards with the piece of three-ply board. In the light of his flash lamp he administered himself a large dosis of insuline. Naked, in hypoglycaemic coma, he finally died from a bronchopneumonia in the chillness of his "grave".

Nowhere in medical literature we found a similar case described.