

2 Feb Bee

INSIDE

| | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Ann/Abby.....E14 | Movies.....E4 |
| Business.....C1 | Notices.....F6,F8 |
| California.....A19 | Obituaries.....B4 |
| Classified.....F1 | Opinion.....B6 |
| Comics.....E14 | Sports.....D1 |
| Crossword.....E15 | Television.....E13 |

fresnobee.com

Interactive golf; letters to the editor; sports; news and opinion forums; stock market updates; weather; seven-day story archive; and much more.

©2001 The Fresno Bee ★



Tests on dead woman conflict

Fresno County coroner found normal levels of selenium.

BY MATTHEW KREAMER
THE FRESNO BEE

A Fresno woman thought to have died of selenium poisoning had normal levels of the element in her blood shortly after her death.

A sample of Linda Adanalian's blood taken the day after her death in February 2000 showed a selenium level far below toxic levels, according to a Fresno County Coroner's document.

That document seems to contradict re-

sults of hard-tissue tests run by Mayo Medical Laboratories and analyzed by the director of the Kentucky Regional Poison Center.

Those tests show selenium levels in Adanalian's kidney and liver of more than 11 times the normal amount, far above toxic levels, according to toxicologist Henry Spiller, director of the Kentucky center.

"I have reviewed the report from Mr. Spiller ... [and] I have some questions and concerns regarding the report's findings and conclusions," said Stephen Avalos, a pathologist who reviewed the report at the request of Adanalian's hus-

Please see **ADANALIAN**, Page A18

Adanalian: Lab to repeat tests on tissue

Continued from Page A1
band, Mark.

The normal blood-test results that concern Avalos also raised the eyebrows of Spiller and Eric Pfeifer, the Mayo Medical Laboratories pathologist who tested Adanalian's hair, kidney and liver tissue.

But both men say the lack of selenium in the blood does not disprove Spiller's conclusion that Adanalian died of acute selenium poisoning.

Spiller has not analyzed a blood sample, but said there are several reasons why the selenium levels in Adanalian's blood could have been normal.

"There may be a dilutionary issue; she was given two liters of fluid in 12 minutes," he said. "Also, they preserved the heart with mercury, and selenium bonds with mercury. They contaminated the heart with mercury, and I don't know that the blood doesn't have a preservative in there that is affecting it."

While there are theories to explain the low selenium count in the blood, there are no similar theories to explain the high levels of selenium in the liver and kidney tissue, Spiller said.

Meanwhile, the tissues are being retested to make sure the high selenium readings were accurate.

Pfeifer said he expected results from the new tests, done at his facility in Rochester, Minn., to be returned Monday. Tissue samples were also sent to National Medical Laboratories in Pennsylvania for further independent analysis. Those results will take several more weeks to return, Pfeifer said.

Pfeifer said he will also interpret the results at that time. If each new test shows the same high selenium count that was found before, he's inclined to agree with Spiller's conclusion that Adanalian's death was caused by selenium poisoning, he said.

"I would trust him and also the reading I've done that points to it," Pfeifer said. "All we need to do is confirm our testing."

Adanalian, 37, died Feb. 11 after taking her four children to "The Little Mermaid" ice show at Selland Arena. When the show was over, the former elementary school teacher complained of chest pains, said she couldn't breathe, then passed out. Paramedics took her to Community Medical Center-Fresno, where she died a few hours later.

Adanalian's family urged the Fresno County Coroner's Office to exhume her body several months after her death so that the tissue samples could be sent

to the Mayo Clinic. They also paid the Kentucky Regional Poison Center to analyze the results.

Mark Adanalian opposed the exhumation, saying he wished his wife to rest in peace.

Coroner David Hadden received Spiller's report this week. Venu Gopal, Fresno County's chief forensic pathologist, is considering the report as he continues to investigate before declaring an official cause of death.

"We don't have enough at this time to call it a selenium case," Gopal said. "This is an unusual and difficult case, and you have to take everything into consideration. If it turns out to be selenium, it will be selenium."

Spiller, though, has little doubt despite limited documented cases of selenium-poisoning deaths in medical literature. He said he sees about 50 cases of nonfatal selenium poisoning per year, and Pfeifer called Spiller "the selenium guy" when asked about Spiller's national reputation as an expert.

"We're basing it on published scientific data," Spiller said. "We're not just saying it looks like a duck; we've measured a lot of ducks in our time."

► The reporter can be reached at mkreamer@fresnobee.com or 441-6208.