

Guilty plea entered in overdose of 17-year-old

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12:12 p.m. June 11, 2008

EL CAJON – Just as her trial was about to begin, a Santee mother of three pleaded guilty Wednesday to giving a fatal overdose of powerful pain-killing drug to a 17-year-old friend of her daughter's. Laura S. Wion is to be sentenced to between four and six years in prison under the terms of a plea agreement for causing the Aug. 2006 death of Kelsea Lyn Phelps by giving her methadone – a painkiller also used to ease withdrawal symptoms for those addicted to opiates such as heroin.

Wion, 45, pleaded guilty to charges of involuntary manslaughter and felony child abuse.

El Cajon Superior Court Judge Charles W. Ervin indicated he was leaning toward giving Wion the maximum six-year sentence at a July 25 hearing.

The judge told Wion's lawyer, Michael Malowney, that "quite frankly, it might be an uphill argument" if Malowney pushed for a lesser sentence at the July hearing.

Despite her guilty plea, Wion told her husband "I know I'm innocent" as she embraced him outside the courtroom after he collapsed in tears on a nearby bench.

Kelsea's mother, Tracy Lyn Moe, said outside the courtroom that she wanted Wion to stand trial to account for her actions.

"I wanted her to basically sit in front of a jury and have people hear what she did," Moe said. "There is no justice for taking the life of someone else's child. She can go to prison for six years but after six years, she can get her life back. She can go home to her husband and daughters. My daughter is never coming back."

If Wion went to trial and was convicted, she faced a maximum penalty of up to 10 years in prison, Deputy District Attorney Chris Lindberg said. In exchange for Wion's guilty plea, the judge dismissed a charge of furnishing narcotics to a minor.

Wion's plea came the morning jury selection was set to start.

Kelsea, an aspiring fashion designer and student at the East County Academy of Learning in Lakeside, was visiting Wion's daughter when Wion gave her a bottle of methadone and penicillin pills, according to testimony at prior court hearings. Investigators found 18 ½ methadone pills and 12 penicillin pills in Kelsea's backpack.

Kelsea had been complaining of a sore throat and had chronic severe back pain, Moe said.

The night before she died, Kelsea said she was tired and went to bed around 9 p.m., Moe said. She said she checked on Kelsea about 30 minutes after Kelsea went to bed and she appeared to be asleep.

The next morning, when Moe went to wake her for school, she found she had died from the overdose.

Chief County Medical Examiner Glenn Wagner testified at an October hearing that methadone is a slow-acting drug that can take several hours for its full effects to be felt.

Wion's lawyer has said that Wion was prescribed the drug for pain.

In court Wednesday, Wion told the judge that she is currently taking methadone, the pain killer OxyContin, an anti-seizure medication and an anti-depressant, all under a doctor's prescriptions.

She said the drugs didn't affect her ability to understand her guilty plea or what was happening in court.

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