

Attempted homicide by injection of a noxious substance

The use of chemical evidence analysis, injury detail and expert advice to identify an unknown substance which had been injected, facilitating life-saving medical treatment.

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Key details

Purpose	Investigation cases
Topic	Homicide Violence (other) Forensics
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Start date	January 2024

Description

A male had travelled from Teeside using his own vehicle with false plates, before checking into a hotel disguised and using a pseudonym. He attended his stepfather's home in Newcastle pretending to be a National Health Service (NHS) worker administering a COVID-19 booster injection, and administered an injection of an unknown substance to the victim.

Within 36 hours, the victim was suffering from life-threatening injuries to his left arm and developed necrotising fasciitis. Large areas of his arm had to be cut away to prevent the disease from

spreading. Doctors did not know what had been administered and police were under time pressure to identify the suspect and the substance used.

Using CCTV, automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) and financial enquiries, the suspect was identified and arrested at his home address. A [Section 32](#) search of his house and garage led to the discovery of castor beans, solvents, and ricin production methodology. Other poisonous chemicals were also located at the address, including a hypodermic needle labelled 'methyl iodide'. Analysis of the suspect's mobile phone and computer also revealed extensive research about poisons.

Line of enquiry

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory was contacted for advice to determine whether ricin, or any of the other chemicals found, could have been used. An expert adviser was also engaged to help identify the substance used.

From the victim's medical notes and injury photographs, the expert adviser concluded that methyl iodide was the most likely poison used. This information was sent to doctors treating the victim.

Outcome

In his defence statement, the suspect agreed that methyl iodide was the chemical used but denied committing the offence.

He later plead guilty at court and was sentenced to 31 years and five months in prison.