

Important Message from our Medical Advisory Committee

February 26, 2024

From: Alex Kolevzon, MD, PMSF MAC chairperson; William Bennett, Jr, MD, MS; Elizabeth Berry-Kravis, MD, PhD; Ann Neumeyer, MD; Curtis Rogers, MD; Teresa Kohlenberg, MD

Re: Information for Caregivers of Patients with Phelan-McDermid Syndrome

Dear families affected by Phelan-McDermid syndrome,

The Phelan-McDermid syndrome community has experienced profound grief and concern over the deaths of some of our beloved children and adults. The Phelan-McDermid Syndrome Foundation (PMSF) is urgently working with the PMSF Medical Advisory Committee (MAC) to understand the causes of these deaths and has begun a “mortality review.” This review is a comprehensive and detailed process of speaking with families, reviewing medical records in depth, and identifying causes of death and any patterns that emerge which will be helpful to reduce risk.

In the past five years, PMSF is aware of 32 individuals who have passed away. Their ages have ranged widely from younger than 1-years-old (including at birth) to 52-years-old. Males and females were equally at risk. There is still much to learn, but based on the current state of knowledge, we can say that many deaths have been related to:

- complications of severe epilepsy
- choking / aspiration, possibly related to catatonia - associated feeding problems
- significant worsening of problems with digestive tract functioning
- presence of a co-existing genetic condition in addition to Phelan-McDermid syndrome

While this is alarming and critical to understand in more depth, it is important to note that *the annual mortality rate is less than 0.3% of the total cases known to the PMSF*. By way of comparison, the overall infant mortality rate in the United States is approximately 0.5% and the adult mortality rate is approximately 1%.

The PMSF and MAC have planned two steps to understand the risk of mortality in Phelan-McDermid syndrome. With the help and consent of the families, we will first conduct a qualitative assessment where we interview families who lost loved ones to gain deeper knowledge of the details and circumstances surrounding the death. Second, we will collect all available medical records to corroborate and amplify our understanding. Our ultimate goal is

to *identify early risk factors* and potential *management strategies* to reduce the risk of mortality. We will also publish and share these findings.

Please contact info@pmsf.org if you have questions or concerns. Details about requesting a consult from the PMSF Neuropsychiatric Consultation Group are here: <https://pmsf.org/neuropsychiatric-consultation-group/>