

Elijah McClain's Death Caused by Ketamine Overdose

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On September 23, autopsy reports of 23-year-old Elijah McClain were publicly released, citing ketamine overdose as his cause of death.

The original autopsy report, released several months after his passing, stated that there was not enough evidence to determine how McClain died. After a grand jury testimony, the autopsy was amended to reexamine the case. During these proceedings, McClain's death came under greater scrutiny when Colorado Public radio disclosed that the county coroner had met with police prior to the autopsy and that police investigators were present during the examination.

McClain was arrested on August 24, 2019 after a call was made to the police claiming that there was a "sketchy" man walking around the street in a ski mask and flailing his arms. The caller stated that the man did not appear to pose any threat. In interviews after the incident, McClain's friends speculated that his arm-flailing was most likely dancing, as he often listened to music while walking. They also stated that he dressed warmly due to a blood circulation disorder that caused him to chill easily, which was why he was wearing a ski mask.

According to the police report, McClain resisted when confronted by officers Randy Roedema and Nathan Woodyard. Roedema then called out to Woodyard, shouting, "he is going for your gun". Officers responded by slamming McClain into a wall. Whether the McClain reached for the gun or not is still in question, as all officers at the scene state that their cameras had fallen off.

The police officers held McClain on the ground for 15 minutes, yelling "I can't breathe". He proceeded to vomit several times, even apologizing, "I'm sorry, I wasn't trying to do that, I can't breathe correctly." While his arms were handcuffed behind his back, Woodyard put McClain into a carotid control hold, cutting off blood flow to the brain. One officer then threatened to let his police dog bite McClain as he laid on the ground.

At one point, three officers were on top of McClain, who was only 5 feet 6 inches and weighed 140 pounds. They claimed that he was "acting crazy" and had attacked him with "incredible, crazy strength" before restraining him. Without speaking to him first, paramedics injected him with 500 mg of ketamine, a dose too strong for a 200-pound person, let alone one that is 140 pounds. On the ambulance ride, McClain did not have a pulse. He was pronounced brain dead three days later, on August 27, 2019.

In the first autopsy, the coroner stated that McClain's "physical exertion" was the likely cause of death, but could have been related to the carotid control hold he was placed in. As the current autopsy has concluded, it is likely the dose of ketamine that killed him.

His case was brought to light shortly after the death of George Floyd, but his family continues to fight to this day. Family and friends regarded him as the sweetest, gentlest person to exist. McClain's mother, Sheneen, remembers her son as a talented, fiercely independent man. She has dedicated her life to fighting for her son's name, making sure that people remember who he was.