

British toddler at center of legal battle dies

April 28 2018, by Danica Kirka And Sylvia Hui



In this April 23, 2018 handout photo provided by Alfies Army Official, brain-damaged toddler Alfie Evans cuddles his mother Kate James at Alder Hey Hospital, Liverpool, England. Kate James and Tom Evans, the parents, said on Facebook that 23-month-old Alfie Evans, who had an incurable degenerative brain condition and was at the center of a legal battle over his treatment, died

early morning Saturday April 28, 2018. (Alfies Army Official via AP)

Alfie Evans, the sick British toddler whose parents won support from Pope Francis during a protracted legal battle over his treatment, died early Saturday. He was 23 months old.

Kate James and Tom Evans made the announcement on social media, saying they were "heartbroken." The death of Alfie, who had a rare degenerative brain condition that left him in a "semi-vegetative state" with almost no brain function, came five days after doctors removed life support.

Doctors overseeing Alfie's care in the city of Liverpool said further treatment was futile and not in his best interests, and that he should be allowed to die. But his parents fought for months to try to convince judges to allow them to take him to the Vatican's children's hospital so he could be kept on life support. The parents' campaign was backed by the pope and Christian groups, which helped draw international attention to the case.

The hospital withdrew Alfie's life support Monday after a series of court rulings sided with the doctors and blocked further medical treatment.

"My gladiator lay down his shield and gained his wings at 02:30," Evans, 21, said in Facebook post decorated with a broken heart and crying emojis.

The death came after an easing of tensions between the family and the hospital. Evans had pledged to work with doctors to give his son "dignity and comfort," as he called for a truce in the divisive case.



Balloons are placed outside Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool, England, where seriously ill Alfie Evans is a patient, Friday April 27, 2018. Kate James and Tom Evans, the parents, said on Facebook that 23-month-old Alfie Evans, who had an incurable degenerative brain condition and was at the center of a legal battle over his treatment, died early morning Saturday April 28, 2018. (Peter Byrne/PA via AP)

"Our lives have been turned upside down by the intense focus on Alfie and his situation," Evans said Thursday outside Liverpool's Alder Hey Children's Hospital, where Alfie has been treated for more than a year.

He thanked the hospital staff "for their dignity and professionalism during what must be an incredibly difficult time for them too."

It was a strikingly different tone from the one he struck earlier, when he said doctors were wrong about Alfie's prognosis and threatened to

resume his fight in court.

Under British law, courts are asked to intervene when parents and doctors disagree on the treatment of a child. In such cases, the rights of the child take primacy over the parents' right to decide what's best for their offspring.



In this Thursday April 26, 2018 file photo Tom Evans holds up his phone showing a photo of his son Alfie as he speaks to the media outside Alder Hey Children's Hospital where the 23-month-old who has been at the centre of a life-support treatment dispute, in Liverpool, England. Kate James and Tom Evans, the parents, said on Facebook that 23-month-old Alfie Evans, who had an incurable degenerative brain condition and was at the center of a legal battle over his treatment, died early morning Saturday April 28, 2018. (Peter Byrne/PA via AP, File)

Alder Hey issued a statement to express "heartfelt sympathy and condolences to Alfie's family."

"All of us feel deeply for Alfie, Kate, Tom and his whole family and our thoughts are with them," the statement said. "This has been a devastating journey for them and we would ask that their privacy and the privacy of staff at Alder Hey is respected."

Alfie's case received much attention outside Britain, especially in Catholic countries. Pope Francis, who had met with Evans, appealed for the wishes of the boy's parents to be heeded, saying only God can decide who dies. Italy even granted Alfie citizenship and put a military plane on standby to transport him to Rome if the courts allowed it.

Italian Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano tweeted Saturday: "Goodbye, little Alfie. We loved you."



People hold candles as they attend a prayer vigil for terminally ill toddler Alfie Evans, in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, Thursday, April 26, 2018. The British hospital treating Alfie Evans withdrew his life support Monday after a series of court rulings sided with the doctors and blocked further medical treatment. On Wednesday the Court of Appeal rejected a new bid by the parents to take Alfie to the Vatican's hospital in Rome. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

A leading Italian right-wing politician, Veneto Gov. Luca Zaia, said the "so-called civilized world has supplied the latest proof of enormous incivility."

Officials in largely Catholic Poland and Italy have criticized Britain's courts and state-run National Health Service on the case.

Emotions have run high over the case, with supporters staging angry protests regularly outside the hospital, at times trying to storm its entrance.

Alfie's mother, 20-year-old Kate James, posted that she was heartbroken over Alfie's death but added, "Thank you everyone for all your support."



Candles and balloons are placed outside Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool, England, where seriously ill Alfie Evans is a patient, Friday April 27, 2018. The father of terminally ill toddler Alfie Evans said Thursday that he would work with doctors to give his son "dignity and comfort," as he called for a truce in a divisive case that has pitted doctors and the British courts against Alfie's parents, Christian groups and the pope. (Peter Byrne/PA via AP)



People hold candles as they attend a prayer vigil for terminally ill toddler Alfie Evans, in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, Thursday, April 26, 2018. The British hospital treating Alfie Evans withdrew his life support Monday after a series of court rulings sided with the doctors and blocked further medical treatment. On Wednesday the Court of Appeal rejected a new bid by the parents to take Alfie to the Vatican's hospital in Rome. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

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