

# Evidence suggests Todd could have hanged himself: Expert

Forensic expert takes court through two-hour reconstruction of scene

By **FENG ZENGKUN**

**EXTENSIVE** reconstructions of the scene where American researcher Shane Todd was found dead showed that he could have hanged himself, a forensic expert told an inquiry yesterday.

The body of Dr Todd was discovered hanging against a door in his bedroom last June. The 31-year-old was suspended from his neck by a black strap, which had been secured to the top of the door to a toilet in the room.

His feet, said emergency first responders, appeared to be flat on the floor when they first found his body — a point his parents' lawyers had raised, as they questioned whether his feet could have borne his weight.

Mr Rick Todd and his wife Mary do not believe their son killed himself. But evidence from an elaborate, two-hour presentation by Health Sciences Authority (HSA) laboratory director Lim Chin Chin suggested otherwise.

Taking the court through conducted experiments, Ms Lim showed how Dr Todd's weight could have caused the black strap to stretch over time, leading to his feet eventually touching the floor.

She added that tests with similar straps of comparable length to

the one found at the scene showed that, given Dr Todd's 1.84m height, he would have been suspended between 6.5cm and 11.2cm above the floor initially.

This was based on simulations using replicas of items found at the scene, which included the strap, a towel wrapped around Dr Todd's neck and an upright chair found on another towel about 1.5m from the toilet door.

Ms Lim said tests showed it was possible for a person of Dr Todd's height and weight to hang himself using the chair, without another person being present. He could have used the chair to secure the noose to the door, before pushing it away with his feet to where it was found.

Another test using chairs of different weights, but similar in size, confirmed that a chair could remain standing after being pushed away. It was also possible for a towel under the chair to remain relatively flat and not bunched up, as was found at the scene.

She said when pushed, a chair with a towel underneath it would move between 0.94m and 1.7m, a range within which the one at the scene of Dr Todd's death was found. The senior consultant forensic scientist of 18 years said tests also showed scratch marks



**Dr Todd's mother Mary leaving court yesterday, accompanied by her son Chet and his wife Corynne. The Todd family do not believe that the researcher, who was found dead last June, killed himself.**  
ST PHOTO: SEAH KWANG PENG

on the floor could have been caused by the chair.

Responding to the State Counsel's query, she said a knot on the improvised noose was similar to one on a website Dr Todd had apparently visited a month before his death. The website had a guide to create a "hangman's noose".

Ms Lim's graphic presentation was too much to take for Mrs Todd, who asked the court, through her lawyers, for an early adjournment as she felt nauseous.

Earlier in the day, the state also had to rebut, among other suggestions by her lawyers, that a laptop found in Dr Todd's bedroom could have been accessed remotely to upload a suicide note.

A technology crime for ensic expert said an analysis showed no traces of remote access or hacking, and the laptop had only one password-protected user with no history of failed log-ins.

The State Counsel, responding to media queries last night, said Dr Edward Adelstein, a pathologist engaged by the Todds in the United States, would testify via video-link on Monday. On why the case has been focused on suicide and not homicide, they said:

"While counsel for (Dr Todd's) next of kin has raised hypothetical possibilities as to what might have happened, other than providing us reports, which we have submitted to the court, they have not provided any evidence."

The inquiry continues today.

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## Key findings of forensic simulations, tests

■ Why were Dr Shane Todd's feet seemingly flat on the floor even though he was hanged? Based on simulations, a person of his weight and height would have been suspended between 6.5cm and 11.2cm above the floor initially. But tests with replica straps used to make the noose showed they could have stretched over time due to the load.

■ Why were there scratch marks on the floor? Experiments showed that the scratches could have been caused by the chair as it was pushed away.

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