# Doctors: Ex-North Korea detainee Otto Warmbier has severe brain injury, no signs of botulism

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Released North Korea detainee Otto Warmbier suffered extensive brain damage and shows no current signs of botulism, doctors at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center said Thursday.

The 22-year-old has not spoken or "engaged in any purposeful movements" since arriving in the country Tuesday night, said Dr. Daniel Kanter, professor of neurology and director of the Neurocritical Care Program.

"He shows no signs of understanding language or responding to verbal commands," the doctor said, adding that Warmbier's condition is best described as "unresponsive wakefulness."

The doctors said they could not speculate on what caused his injuries. They said they had no information about the kind of care he received in North Korea.

The earliest images of his brain from North Korea are dated April 2016, Kanter said. An analysis suggests the injury likely occurred in the preceding weeks.

"This pattern of brain injury is usually seen as result of cardiopulmonary arrest where the blood supply to brain is inadequate for a period of time resulting in the death of brain tissue," he said.

The doctors would not discuss Warmbier's prognosis.

Recently released North Korea detainee Otto Warmbier has suffered severe neurological damage and his family flatly rejects the regime's explanation for his condition, reporters were told Thursday in his Ohio hometown.

Warmbier, a 22-year-old college student who returned Tuesday to the United States after 17 months in detention, is in stable condition at University of Cincinnati Medical Center but has a "severe neurological injury," hospital spokeswoman Kelly Martin said.

Martin declined to elaborate, saying doctors will share more information about Warmbier's condition in a separate news conference Thursday afternoon.

But Warmbier's father left no doubt he blames North Korea, blasting the secretive regime in a 23-minute news conference at his son's alma mater, Wyoming High School north of Cincinnati.

The family doesn't believe North Korea's explanation that Otto fell into a coma after contracting botulism and taking a sleeping pill shortly after he was sentenced in March 2016, Fred Warmbier said.

"Even if you believe their explanation of botulism and a sleeping pill causing a coma -- and we don't -- there is no excuse for any civilized nation to have kept his condition a secret and denied him top-notch medical care for so long," Warmbier said.

The father, wearing the cream sport coat his son wore during his televised trial in North Korea, stopped short of saying how he believed his son was injured.

"We're going to leave that to the doctors (to explain) today," he said.

He called on North Korea to release other American detainees.

"There's no excuse for the way the North Koreans treated our son. And no excuse for the way they've treated so many others," he said. "No other family should have to endure what the Warmbiers have."

Conviction and release

Otto Warmbier was a University of Virginia student when he was detained in January 2016 at the airport in Pyongyang while on his way home. He had been on a tour of the reclusive country, his parents said.

North Korean authorities claimed they had security footage of him trying to steal a banner containing a political slogan that was hanging from a wall of his Pyongyang hotel.

That was used as evidence in his hourlong trial. He was found guilty of committing a "hostile act" against the country and sentenced in March 2016 to 15 years of hard labor. It was the last time he was seen publicly before this week.

His parents learned of their son's condition -- what North Korea called a coma -- only last week, they said in a statement.

Critical of Obama administration

Fred Warmbier appeared critical of the Obama administration's handling of Otto's detention, saying the family heeded the US government's initial advice to take a low profile "without result."

They kept quiet "on the false premise that (North Korea) would treat Otto fairly and let him go," he said.

He said he and his wife, Cindy, decided this year that the "time for strategic patience was over," and so they did media interviews and traveled to Washington to meet the State Department's special representative for North Korean policy, Joseph Yun.

Yun met in May with North Korean representatives in Norway, and the North Koreans agreed that Swedish representatives would be allowed to visit Otto Warmbier and three other US detainees, a senior State Department official said on condition of anonymity this week.

After the Swedes visited one detainee, North Korea representatives sought another meeting with Yun, and it was at that June 6 meeting in New York that North Korea's UN ambassador told Yun that Warmbier was in a coma, the official said.

North Korea released Warmbier six days later.

Fred Warmbier praised the Trump administration's efforts: "They have our thanks for bringing Otto home."

When asked whether then-President Barack Obama could have done more, Warmbier replied, "I think the results speak for themselves."

Father, supporters share emotional moment

The father saluted his son as a brilliant, adventurous and courageous man who did what he could to endure brutality and terror.

Fred Warmbier shared an emotional moment with supporters after he left the news conference. While driving away, he saw a group of about 150 people wearing blue and white shirts, and ribbons of the same color combination, in support of Otto at a nearby intersection.

He left the vehicle and spoke to the crowd. Some were in tears as he spoke to them.

"I'm proud of my son," he said.

"We're proud of him, too," some in the crowd shouted back.

Three other US detainees

Warmbier's release coincided with basketball star Dennis Rodman's latest visit to North Korea, though Michael Anton, a US national security spokesman, told CNN there is no connection between the two.

Fred Warmbier said the same Thursday.

"Dennis Rodman had nothing to do with Otto," he said.

Rodman was asked by reporters Tuesday if he would bring up the cases of Warmbier and three other Americans detained in North Korea. "That's not my purpose right now," he said. "My purpose is to go over there and try to see if I can keep bringing sports to North Korea."

The other Americans held by Pyongyang are Kim Sang Duk and Kim Hak-song, academics who worked at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology, and businessman named Kim Dong Chul.