Dr. Priyanka Venkataraman

October 20, 2026 | Government witness | Direct, cross, redirect and recross

Supplemental Reporting[1]

Notes by Kristina Rex

Direct examination

The notes identify Dr. Priyanka Venkataraman as Sandra Birchmore's former obstetrician-gynecologist. She said she had practiced as an attending OB/GYN for eight years and was no longer practicing as a physician at the time of trial.

The notes describe a December 16, 2020 record recording Sandra's reported reproductive and relationship history, and a December 28 quantitative hCG value of 99. They record an hCG value of 9,954 on January 8, 2021.

An ultrasound on January 18 showed an intrauterine pregnancy, fetal cardiac activity, and an estimated gestational age of six weeks and four days. The notes describe a perigestational hemorrhage and counseling about monitoring bleeding and pelvic rest.

Sandra reportedly contacted the practice about spotting after intercourse, without pain or cramping. The notes describe a follow-up discussion and repeat ultrasound planned for the following week.

A January 25 ultrasound reportedly showed a continuing viable pregnancy at seven weeks and four days. The notes include an estimated due date of September 9, 2021 and a conception window of December 7–17, 2020.

The physician described prenatal mental-health screening, including the Edinburgh questionnaire and its question about thoughts of self-harm. The notes report that on January 21 Sandra scored 17/30 overall and zero on the self-harm item. The witness described a nonzero answer on that item as requiring immediate assessment.

The notes report discussion of mental-health symptoms and initiation of sertraline (Zoloft), beginning at 50 mg with a planned increase. Sandra later reported jitteriness or shakiness, and the clinician reduced the dose.

The witness said she was surprised to learn Sandra's death had been classified as suicide. The notes record her saying there was no indication of destabilization at the January 29 contact and no report of suicidal thoughts to the obstetrics practice.

Cross-examination

The defense questioned distinctions between Zoloft and Prozac, prior treatment, historical reports of self-harm, anxiety, earlier medical events, family circumstances, and Sandra's reported reproductive history.

The physician described Sandra's pregnancy as high-risk for several reasons and requested clarification when asked whether she was a "complex" patient.

Cross addressed whether the practice knew Sandra was awake and texting during the night of January 31 into February 1. The notes record that the witness was not aware of those messages and did not receive that information from Sandra.

The afternoon notes record questions about a January 21 record denying bipolar disorder or manic episodes, SSRI prescribing considerations, frequency of appointments, and what the witness would have wanted to know about a historical suicide attempt. Multiple objections and sustained objections are noted.

The notes recount questioning about a journal entry from approximately four years earlier describing conflict with Sandra's aunt and a reported attempt to overdose. The witness reportedly said she would have asked about current self-harm thoughts and referred Sandra for emergency assessment if appropriate.

Redirect and recross

On redirect, the physician said her treatment decisions were based on Sandra's presentation and answers at the time, not solely on a journal entry from years earlier. She discussed sleep disruption during pregnancy and noted that sertraline can be associated with either insomnia or drowsiness.

The notes record that Sandra contacted the office about jitteriness more than once but did not report suicidal ideation to the practice.

On recross, the witness said she did not know whether Sandra had actually taken sertraline in 2019 and that she could only know what Sandra reported, not what Sandra had not disclosed.

Source posts

- Kristina Rex — October 20 morning notes, thread 1
- Kristina Rex — October 20 morning notes, thread 2
- Kristina Rex — October 20 morning notes, thread 3

Kristina Rex — October 20 afternoon notes, thread 1

Kristina Rex — October 20 afternoon notes, thread 2

[1] **Supplemental Reporting:** Material under this heading is reconstructed from identified contemporaneous courtroom reporting or notes by a source other than Grant Smith Ellis.