

Gaia mum: I have no idea if I'll get closure

Legal action against hospital after 'headache' death

Friday, 1st July — By Anna Lamche



A GRIEVING mother whose daughter died suddenly at UCLH after developing a headache says she is still waiting for answers, almost a year after her death.

Lady Dorit Young has now launched legal action against the hospital in which her daughter died, telling the *Tribune* this is her last opportunity to find out what happened to 25-year-old Gaia. Ms Young said she would not be able to grieve for her daughter properly until she understands the cause of her death.

“I have no idea if I will ever get closure,” she said. “I live completely suspended. It feels so unreal that Gaia actually died a year ago.”

Gaia, an otherwise healthy young woman, was admitted to A&E in July 2021 after developing a severe headache and vomiting. Within 16 hours, she was “effectively dead”, Ms Young said.

Despite two serious incident reports and an inquest being conducted into Gaia's death, the underlying cause of her sudden illness is still not understood. While doctors know she died because of cerebral oedema – or brain swelling – in the words of coroner Mary Hassell, “the cause of this remains unclear”.

“How can it be that a previously healthy young woman dies in a leading hospital and yet nobody knows why?” Ms Young asked the inquest in February.

Ms Young now describes her daughter's inquest as “flawed” because, in the words of the hospital's lawyer Clementine Robertshaw, coroner Ms Hassell allowed UCLH to “consider the most appropriate witnesses” to bring to the inquest.

No neurologist was present, despite the fact the inquest was told Gaia's condition was “limited to the brain”.

According to the coroners' regulations, “a coroner may delegate administrative, but not judicial functions, to coroners' officers and other support staff”. Ms Young said the decision to allow the NHS Trust to determine which witnesses to call potentially amounts to the delegation of judicial functions to “one interested party, [but] not me”.

After the inquest, UCLH told Ms Young they would ask a neurologist to look into Gaia's condition. This neurologist's report, the Trust wrote, “will ensure that investigation has been thorough and comprehensive”. Ms Young fears this means the evidence presented to the inquest in February was not “completely comprehensive”.

Having lost confidence in the findings of the inquest, Ms Young said that launching a legal claim against the Trust is the last avenue available to her to discover what happened to her daughter.

“I am wanting answers,” she said. “I hope to get independent neurologists' reviews done to [find out] what might have happened to Gaia.”

Ms Young's negligence claim is currently in the pre-litigation phase, meaning it has not yet – and may not – reach the courts.

“I feel for public safety as well – we have detected an unsafe medical practice which can kill again, and so I have no choice. I have to carry on,” she added.

A UCLH spokesperson said: “We understand this continues to be an extremely sad time for Gaia's mother and loved ones, and offer our deepest sympathies.

While the coroner could not say that different care could have prevented Gaia's death, we do acknowledge some things could have been done better."

They added: "We are therefore commissioning an external review, by an independent neurologist, to explore further the circumstances surrounding Gaia's death. This will build on the learning from our internal investigation and the coroner's report. We have invited Gaia's mother to meet with us so we can discuss her daughter's care and next steps."