



Daughter of peer died after complaining of headache, inquest told

Gaia Young's mother accuses medics of missing chances to save 25-year-old daughter of late Labour peer Michael Young

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The "polite" and "clean-living" daughter of Michael Young died after suffering a sudden unexplained headache, an inquest has heard, as the deceased's mother accused medics of missing chances to save her.

Gaia Young was taken to hospital having fallen severely ill after going out for a bike ride and meeting friends on 17 July, it was said.

Doctors said Young, whose father was the late social entrepreneur and Labour peer Lord Young, was "confused" and falling asleep when she was seen at University College hospital.

They were initially concerned that Young could be intoxicated but an inquest at St Pancras coroner's court on Monday was told she did not drink excessively or take recreational drugs.

Heatstroke and dehydration were also suspected but no underlying cause for the healthy 25-year-old's rapid deterioration was found, leaving her family and friends searching for answers, the inquest heard.

Dorit Uhlemann, Lady Young, paid tribute to her "much-loved, beautiful and healthy" daughter in a written statement read to the inquest on Monday.

"I believe that with proper care she need not have died," she said. "I believe she lost the chance to live. How can it be that a previously healthy young woman dies in a hospital and yet nobody knows why?"

Lady Young said her daughter had begun suffering a “sudden, severe headache with awful vomiting” at about 7.30pm at home on 17 July.

“I think that Gaia would have been very scared, embarrassed and self-conscious in hospital,” she said.

The mother added she “was not kept informed” and told the inquest that her daughter had been “completely misdiagnosed” and “signs were misread”.

“[Gaia] was a responsible, polite, clean-living young woman with keen interest in her own health and in her intellectual and professional development,” she said. “She was also very protective over me and as her only parent left would not have wanted to worry me. She was my beloved child.

“If anyone had asked me I would have told them, but it’s simply not possible that she would have been recreationally intoxicated.”

After arriving at hospital, Young, an artist, told medics: “I made a mistake,” but was unable to give a detailed account of her day in her drowsy state, it was said.

Dr Zoe Veary, who saw Young after she reached A&E, said she thought the patient may be intoxicated “because of her age and her history of being with friends”. Medics later assessed the risk as less likely while they explored a range of diagnostic possibilities, the inquest heard.

Young appeared “dehydrated and agitated” and was seen rolling on the bed and holding her abdomen, Veary said.

The doctor said in a statement: “When I asked if she had been drinking she said ‘not enough’. She often made the comment ‘I made a mistake’.”

Young was given fluid resuscitation but her condition worsened and she eventually stopped breathing properly the following afternoon, the inquest heard. She suffered respiratory arrest at about 3.15pm, which meant a procedure to diagnose her condition – known as a lumbar puncture – could not be completed, doctors said.

There was no “neurological recovery” after the deterioration during the procedure and Young later died on 21 July, it was said.

Doctors believe she suffered a generalised cerebral edema – a life-threatening condition that leads to fluid developing in the brain, causing it to swell. But the underlying cause of the cerebral edema, which medics said developed rapidly, remains unknown.

Dr Thomas Samuels, who was involved in the lumbar puncture, acknowledged that “communication during the course of the day would ideally have been better” with Young’s mother.

But he said he believed the right medical decisions were made in response to Gaia Young’s condition based on her symptoms.

“I recognise that communication during the course of the day would ideally have been better than it was,” he said.

He added: “I wouldn’t have done anything differently.”

In a narrative determination, the senior coroner, Mary Hassell, said detecting the cerebral edema would likely have led to Young being treated differently, such as receiving “head up” nursing and early admission to intensive care.

Hassell described the case as a “lost chance” and added that the hospital had launched a review in the wake of the incident. “It is clear from the evidence Gaia died from cerebral edema. The cause of this remains unclear. It is possible that the cause of the cerebral edema was hyponatremia. If the cause was hyponatremia, better management would have afforded her a better chance of survival,” she said.

Turning to Young’s family, the coroner added: “I’m very, very sorry for your loss. I’m sorry for the loss of such a young woman, so suddenly and so shockingly.”

A UCLH spokesperson said: “Our heartfelt condolences go to Gaia’s family and friends at this sad and difficult time. We are sorry Gaia’s mother was not kept updated as she should have been during her daughter’s care and we recognise the distress this has caused.

“The coroner could not say that different care could have prevented Gaia’s death but we acknowledge some things could have been done better. We are developing new clinical guidance and training in response to the learning from our investigation. We have invited Gaia’s mother to meet with us to discuss our findings and offer our support.”

This article was amended on 16 February 2022 to add details of the coroner’s narrative verdict and a statement from UCLH that was received after publication.

