

Peer's daughter died of brain condition after medics first thought she may be drunk

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The "healthy" daughter of Lord Young died of an unexplained brain condition as medics may have failed to give her the best chance of survival, an inquest has found.

Gaia Young, 25, stopped breathing properly around 16 hours after she was taken to University College Hospital having suffered a sudden severe headache at home in July last year.

Medics at the London hospital said they initially suspected Gaia Young, whose father was the late social activist and Labour peer Michael Young, was drunk when she arrived at A&E "confused" and "falling asleep".

But an inquest at St Pancras Coroner's Court heard the 25-year-old artist never drank excessively or took recreational drugs and had no underlying health problems.

Senior coroner Mary Hassell found Ms Young had died of a cerebral edema - a condition which causes the brain to swell - after hearing evidence from medical experts involved in the case.

But the cause of the condition, which worsened rapidly and was not immediately diagnosed, remains unknown after a series of missteps in Ms Young's care, the inquest heard.

Crucial scans which could have detected the illness were not carried out and clinicians may have developed "confirmation bias" which caused them to miss other signs, the inquest was told.

Dorit Uhlemann, Lady Young, was not allowed to go with her daughter to hospital due to **coronavirus** restrictions at the time and said she was "not kept informed" of Ms Young's condition.

Dr Thomas Samuels, one of the medics caring for Ms Young, apologised for the lack of communication.

He said a "best interests" decision was made to perform a lumbar puncture - a procedure to diagnose a patient's symptoms - on July 18 without telling her mother.

But the 25-year-old stopped breathing properly which meant the procedure could not be completed, the inquest was told.

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

But the doctor added that he believed the medical decisions made were appropriate in the circumstances.

Ms Young suffered a respiratory arrest at around 3.15pm from which she did not recover and later died in the same hospital on July 21.

She had been out cycling in the day and later met friends before developing a "sudden, severe headache with awful vomiting" at home, Lady Young said.

Dr Zoe Veary, who saw her soon after her hospital admission, said in a written statement: "My initial concern was that she could be intoxicated because of her age and her history of being with friends."

But Lady Young said: "(Gaia) was a responsible, polite, clean-living young woman with a keen interest in her own health and in her intellectual and professional development.

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

She added: "How can it be that a previously healthy young woman dies in a hospital and yet nobody knows why?"

Dr Daniel Wallis, a consultant at UCH, said "confirmation bias" may have played a part in signs of Ms Young's illness being missed after initial concerns that she could have been intoxicated or dehydrated.

The doctor said it was possible the 25-year-old's sodium levels had been too high - a condition known as hyponatremia - but this was not picked up in tests carried out by medics. "This was an exceptional and unusual case, tragically," he added.

Because of her slim build, Ms Young may have been particularly susceptible to hyponatremia, but this was not immediately considered, Dr Wallis said.

The 25-year-old was also held in the foetal position during her time in hospital, which Lady Young suggested may have increased the pressure on her brain.

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

Ms 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.

"A CT (computerised tomography) scan was not conducted as it should have been on admission to hospital late on July 17 2021. It is unclear what it would have found. A CT scan the following day showed subtle signs of raised intracranial pressure, but this was not noted."

Turning to Ms 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."

