

Islington Tribune

One year on: ‘What really happened to Gaia?’



Vigil is held for woman who died after complaining of ‘headache’

Friday, 22nd July – By Dan Carrier and Charlotte Chambers

FRIENDS and family of a woman who died in unexplained circumstances held a vigil yesterday (Thursday) outside the hospital where she died exactly a year ago.

Gaia Young passed away last July after being treated at University College Hospital (UCL).

The 25-year-old had been taken ill following a bike ride and an inquest later ruled that, while it was possible to diagnose she suffered from swelling on the brain, the reasons for the illness had not been discovered – and if it had been diagnosed in time, her life may have been saved.

Gaia, who lived in Gibson Square, Barnsbury, had met up with friends for the ride but after feeling unwell headed to UCL's A&E department.

Complaining of a headache and suffering from vomiting, the young woman's condition deteriorated quickly and an inquest later discovered she had suffered from a cerebral edema – a condition that can causes the brain to swell.

Doctors who treated Gaia said the underlying cause was unknown and it was not diagnosed in time to save her.

Yesterday, standing outside the Euston Road hospital, her mother Lady Dorit Young of Dartington, said: "It is so appalling that Gaia died in UCLH – [it is] a major teaching hospital and [yet] the hospital says, 'We don't want to know what really happened.' It's so astonishing they don't want to find out [what happened to Gaia in order] to prevent further deaths. They've just said 'no' – we have to fight that."

The first time she has held the vigil, she said it had been "so interesting" as people – from doctors to patients – had "engaged" in their campaign. She pledged to hold it once a month from now on, in a bid to get answers.

She said she planned to spend the evening with other bereaved parents, as it was much better to spend the day with friends rather than sitting at home alone feeling sad, although she admitted she had found it hard to motivate herself in day-to-day life.

"At the moment, I don't want to look after plants, I gave all of my plants away. I don't want to cook. Any form of caring – I just don't want to do at the moment," she said.

"My friends are still feeding me. I have been very open with the grief and with the loss. Why should I hide it? I'm not ashamed of it. I want people to think about Gaia and I want to hear from them, their memories and all of that. Being private makes it much more difficult.

"There's a different dimension to life if you embrace death. I can't get Gaia back. I mean, what else can I do?"

She added that memories and reminders of her daughter were constant.

“Still, every day when I’m outside and I see a girl of Gaia’s figure with long blonde hair, it hits me. I think it’s Gaia every single day,” she said.

“I think I will never completely accept that she’s gone. Maybe I’ll get there somehow at some stage but I’m certainly not there yet. The main thing is I don’t want her forgotten, that’s my biggest fear. I really fear that life moves on so fast, people forget, and so for me it’s incredibly important that people remember Gaia, and so whatever I can do for it, I will do.”

Yesterday’s hospital vigil followed a memorial held for Gaia over the weekend. The daughter of the late peer Lord Michael Young, the gathering saw friends from Camden School for Girls, where Gaia had been a popular pupil, joining her family in Gibson Square, to mark the anniversary.



Memorial for Gaia held over the weekend in Gibson Square

The commemoration saw friends bring homemade food that Gaia loved – particularly one with a German and Austrian slant, that were inspired by both her family background and her travels in Europe. Photographs, stories, music and memories were also shared – bringing some comfort to those who were close to her.

At Gaia's inquest at the St Pancras Coroner's Court last year, coroner Mary Hassell said if medics had diagnosed the cerebral edema, Gaia may have been given alternative, lifesaving treatment.

Ms Hassell added: "It is clear from the evidence [that] Gaia died from cerebral edema. The cause of this remains unclear. It is possible that the cause of the cerebral edema was hypernatremia. If the cause was hypernatremia, better management would have afforded her a better chance of survival."

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. 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."