

Probe launched into whether medics missed chances to save 'clean-living daughter' of Labour peer and Toby Young's half sister, 25, who died after complaining of a severe headache during a heatwave

- Gaia Young, 25, was put on a ventilator 16 hours after being admitted to UCLH
- Coroner's report suggested that a lack of CT scan could have led to her death

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The **NHS** has launched an investigation into the death of an aristocrat's 'clean-living' daughter who passed away in hospital just 16 hours after suddenly falling ill.

Gaia Young, 25, the half-sister of writer and broadcaster Toby Young and daughter of the late Lord Young of Dartington, **died after complaining of a severe headache during a heatwave.**

She was rushed from her home in Islington, north **London**, to University College London Hospital (UCLH) by ambulance with acute vomiting on the evening of July 17, 2021.

But Ms Young was put on a ventilator just 16 hours after being admitted and did not regain consciousness - with medics declaring her brain dead four days later.

Ms Young, who worked as a product specialist and artist, had no underlying health conditions and her death was treated as unexplained at the time as a post-mortem was inconclusive. She also tested negative for Covid in hospital.

An inquest at St Pancras Coroner's Court in February 2022 was told she did not drink excessively or take recreational drugs.

At the inquest into her death, a Coroner gave a narrative conclusion, ruling 'a missed chance' by medics when Ms Young first arrived at hospital led to her death.

The hearing was told a CT scan was not ordered when she first arrived and doctors assumed her symptoms were caused by dehydration or drug-taking.

Two lumbar punctures were performed and she was given fluids - all of which could have made her condition worse, the coroner was told.

The official cause of death was recorded as a cerebral oedema - or swelling of the brain - caused intracranial pressure.

But her mother, Lady Young, 64, said her daughter was 'misdiagnosed' and that doctors 'misread signs' as her condition got worse.

She said there are important questions that were never answered at Gaia's inquest, including what caused her brain to suddenly swell.

During the hearing, she claimed two attempted lumbar punctures caused her to become extremely distressed and worsened her condition.

Lady Young described her experience since her daughter's sudden illness as 'like a nightmare train running over me'.

But UCLH will now try to answer some of Lady Young's outstanding questions after her request for a specialist German neurologist to give evidence at the inquest was refused by the coroner.

A spokesman for the Trust said: 'We have agreed to commission a range of independent experts, including a neurologist, to explore further the circumstances surrounding Gaia's death.

'We have invited Gaia's mother to agree the details of the external reviews so that we can proceed.'

Lady Young was not allowed to call her own expert during the inquest, adding: 'The coroner allowed the hospital to choose its own witnesses, which is a breach of natural justice.'

In between her job with a software company, Ms Young was a competitive ballroom dancer, a keen painter and loved to cycle.

She was considering a cycling holiday and had been on a bike ride on the day she fell ill.

Later that evening at around 10.30pm she excused herself from dinner and lay down on a sofa in the front room, before complaining of a sudden headache.

But by the time she got to hospital she was confused, had difficulty communicating with doctors and was vomiting.

Lady Young said: 'The junior doctor there thought she was intoxicated because she was acting strangely.'

'She had hallucinations. She seemed to reach out for things that didn't exist. She was repeating sentences.'

Lady Young said she had since spoken to a doctor who said such assumptions were not uncommon and can be 'a death sentence'.

She added: 'The doctor said that to assume intoxication is a killer of young people.'

'You must never assume intoxication without proof, but it is happening to young people every weekend.'

Coroner Mary Hassell in her conclusion said one possible cause of her oedema was low sodium levels, in which case, 'more monitoring and better clinical management would have afforded her a better chance of survival'.

The Coroner also noted that 'a CT scan was not conducted as it should have been immediately following her admission to hospital'.

Had that scan been done, Mrs Hassell said it could have 'changed the clinical management'.

The coroner said: 'If the earlier CT scan had been conducted and had shown raised intracranial pressure or the later scan had been observed correctly, this would have changed the management [of her care]. Gaia Young would not have had a lumbar puncture attempted.'

'Had intracranial pressure been noted it would have resulted in the 'head up' nursing position, admission to the ICU and potential intubation that would have afforded her a better chance of survival.'

Lady Young said this meant Gaia's critically raised pressure in her brain was not discovered soon enough to save her life.

She added: 'In fact it was never even on the clinicians' radar as long as Gaia was alive.'

'Gaia died right under their noses and the medics did not know what they had on their hands.'

'If they had done the CT scan earlier, there would have been time to consult neurology.'

But while the inquest uncovered possible missed opportunities to save Gaia's life, the actual cause of her oedema was 'unclear', the coroner said.

Lady Young believes this question could have been answered if a neurologist had been called to court, as she had requested.

She said: 'I'm looking for the truth. My daughter was a very fine girl. She would have done what I am doing.'

'I'm incredibly angry with the system. I've never been in a situation like this before. If you would have told me five years ago that this is how things are handled, I just wouldn't have believed you.'

UCLH said new guidance has been given to staff to handle patients with similar symptoms better.

The spokesman added: 'We understand that this continues to be an extremely difficult 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 have already developed new clinical guidance and training following our internal investigation and we are committed to understanding what further lessons can be learned.'

Coroners are prevented by the judicial code from answering media enquiries about individual cases.

