

Hospital ‘finally says sorry’ over care in brain death tragedy

25-year-old died at UCLH in 2021 but mother has always questioned decisions over her care

Monday, 14th July – By Daisy Clague

THE hospital which treated a young woman who died unexpectedly four years ago has said her care fell below their usual “high standards” – but the admission is “a complete cop out”, her mother said.

Gaia Young, 25, was admitted to University College London Hospital (UCLH) in July 2021 when she was taken ill following a bike ride, and died 17 hours later.

Doctors know that Gaia died from a cerebral oedema – a brain swelling – but even after an inquest the underlying cause of her sudden illness remained unexplained.

Her mother, Lady Dorit Young, has continued to fight and campaign for the hospital to take accountability for what she says are failings in its care.

She described the hospital’s latest statement, a partial apology via a short comment in a news article, as “pathetic”, adding: “It came completely out of the blue. I didn’t even notice it at first, then I was extremely furious. Why, four years after Gaia died, why now? Why did they let us do all this work and fight and push? I think it’s cruel.

“They could have done it at court, in the inquest. They could have said it to me in person, but the fact that they put it into a rather unknown publication, it’s very sneaky, it’s pretty shameful. It’s a complete cop out.”

The UCLH comment was made in response to an article called “*Failing the dead: How medical ignorance is killing Britain’s coroner service*”, by journalist Angela Walker in online political magazine *The Lead*.

Ms Walker interviewed Lady Young for her piece, which focused on the possibility that hospital negligence is going unchecked due to a lack of medical expertise among coroners.

In response to the article, a UCLH spokesperson said: “We are sorry that Gaia’s care fell below the high standards we strive to provide and that we did not communicate with her mother as well as we should have at the time of her admission.

“We acknowledge the distress this has caused Lady Young and sympathise greatly that the cause of her beloved daughter’s death is still unknown.”

Lady Young told the Tribune: “It’s a start. I acknowledge it as such, but it’s four years too late. It’s pathetic. It’s not directed towards me which would have been the graceful way to do it.”

According to UCLH, hospital staff met Lady Young in January when they apologised that Gaia’s care fell below the high standards they strive to provide.

Lady Young acknowledged this meeting to the Tribune, but maintained that hospital staff’s comments about missed opportunities in Gaia’s treatment did not amount to a clear apology nor admission of shortcomings in care.

UCLH agreed to work with her to jointly commission four independent expert reports into Gaia’s death.

She received the first report in January this year, which showed that Gaia’s brain scan, said by a UCLH radiologist at the time to be normal, was “grossly abnormal”.

“It was a game changer,” she said.

“[The expert] wrote a very damning report that said every radiologist should have seen the brain swelling.”

When Lady Young herself – not a medical expert – saw side-by-side photos of Gaia’s scan and a “normal” brain scan of a woman her age, she said the difference was clear to her too.

“If I can see it as a complete layperson never having looked at a brain scan, then a radiologist should have seen it.”

Lady Young hopes that the other expert reports, yet to come, will further reveal that more could have been done to save her daughter’s life.

A UCLH spokesperson said: “We met with Lady Young and apologised that Gaia’s care fell below the high standards we strive to provide. We have acknowledged that we did not communicate with Lady Young as well as we should have done at the time of Gaia’s admission.

“We understand the distress this has caused Lady Young and sympathise greatly that the cause of her beloved daughter’s death is still unknown.

“We are committed to learning from external opinion and scrutiny and in 2022, we agreed to commission a range of independent experts to explore further the circumstances surrounding Gaia’s death.

We agreed with Lady Young the scope of the reviews and the experts who will undertake them.

“We have already developed new clinical guidance and training following our internal investigation and we await the outcomes of all the external reviews to understand if further lessons can be learned and acted upon.”