

Coulsdon mother campaigning for hospitals to warn head injury patients of long-term risks

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A MOTHER'S quest to ensure no family has to endure the same tragedy she did is gathering pace.

Joanna Lane's relentless campaign to raise awareness about the long-term risks faced by serious head-injury sufferers has gained the attention of law makers.



TRAGIC: Chris Lane with mum Joanna, who believes he was suffering from hypopituitarism when he killed himself

Twenty-two MPs have signed an early day motion, introduced on February 27, calling on the Government to make hospitals warn head-injury patients about possible hypopituitarism.

Mrs Lane, of Coulsdon, believes the condition – in which the pituitary gland in the brain stops releasing certain hormones – led to her son Christopher's suicide in 2008.

The 63-year-old believes her son's pituitary gland was damaged when he fell from a tree when he was seven and spent a week in a coma.

He appeared to make a full recovery, growing into a "tall, handsome and charming" young man.

But he struggled with depression as an adult, and, his mother learned after his death, he was impotent.

While both are possible signs of hypopituitarism, 31-year-old Chris was never tested for nor warned about the condition, which can surface decades after injury. Doctors today estimate it affects 20 to 30 per cent of brain-injury patients.

Mrs Lane said: "If I had known about the possible link with the head injury we could have gone to an endocrinologist and had hormone levels tested. They can be artificially replaced.

"I had no idea what he was going through.

"All I could see was that he was not pulling himself together."

In the four years since her son's death, the retired English teacher has written to doctors and politicians across the country, urging a change in guidelines given to head-injury patients.

As well as the motion in Parliament, she has secured the backing of 33 doctors, who wrote to the president of the Royal College of Physicians on March 12, warning that doctors risk missing the condition.

And last week, her Freedom of Information Act request to the British Army, revealing that soldiers are warned of the condition, prompted her MP Richard Ottaway to raise the issue in The House of Commons.

Her campaign has also prompted Portsmouth Hospital, NHS Direct, Headway and the Pituitary Foundation to give more information about the condition. And last year, her son's story [inspired an episode of TV drama series Holby City.](#)

But Mrs Lane says there is a lot more to be done.

"If I could get everybody knowing about the possible signs then the rest would sort itself out," she said.

"If we can at least tell people that certain problems may be connected with head injuries, the problems will get solved.

"Even the cost of replacement hormones could go down as the demand increases."

Reflecting on her lengthy campaign, she added: "I just think there is some sort of biological phenomenon that mothers do this when this sort of thing happens.

"We just do."

Some facts on hypopituitarism

- Estimated to occur in 20-30 per cent of those who experience traumatic brain injury

- Symptoms include fatigue, depression, weight problems, miscarriages, impotence and muscle wastage
- Symptoms can be delayed for decades
- Studies point to an increased risk of suicide after head injuries