

On November 11, 2009, a month after her first birthday, Hayley Fullerton - who was born with heart defects and a hole in her heart - died at Birmingham Children's Hospital.

The youngster had been in the hospital following her second operation to fix the defect. During the operation, a tube had collapsed her lung and she was in intensive care for 17 days.

Following a move to a regular ward on November 6, Hayley's condition deteriorated and she was struggling to breathe. Despite Hayley's mum, Paula Stevenson, and her grandparents, Sylvia and Edward Stevenson, expressing their concerns, some staff failed to act appropriately. Soon, Hayley was unable to breathe and eventually died from heart failure.

Following her death, the hospital issued an apology. A narrative verdict after an inquest on her death confirmed that the hospital failures were "of the greatest concern" but stopped short of declaring that the doctors' neglect had caused Hayley's death.

Here, Paula, 41, who runs her own film set design business with partner Bobby Fullerton, 45, tells **new!** her story and says she wants to ensure this doesn't happen to another family...

"I could only hold Hayley's hand and whisper, 'Who's the best girl in the world?' as 15 medics battled to save my 13-month-old daughter's life. I wanted to scream, tell them that, had they listened to me, this wouldn't have happened. But it was too late. My pleas went unheard and, on November 11, 2009, my baby was paying with her life.

"A heart defect was detected in Hayley when she was in the womb, at 22 weeks. My partner Bobby and I were in Belfast when

'My baby's death could have been avoided'

Paula Stevenson tells **new!** of her anguish after the death of her 13-month-old daughter Hayley



we made the discovery, having flown back from Australia, where we lived, to see my parents. Our little girl would need two operations after birth - one when she was born and another, aged one.

"We were so pleased with the care we received when we had the scan in Belfast, we decided to get her treated there. I stayed with my parents while Bobby flew to and from Australia.

"After Hayley's birth and operations, she was fighting fit. She slept and ate well and was full of life and energy. She was small, because of her condition, but she developed well.

"A few months before her final operation, we were told we couldn't have it in

Belfast as planned, because the surgeon had retired. We chose Birmingham Children's Hospital from a list of possible places and got ready for the big day.

"She had the op on October 14, 2009, and had to stay in intensive care afterwards, as her breathing tube had collapsed her lung. But Bobby and I were positive about her recovery. After 17 days, she was moved to a normal ward.

"Her first week on the ward was great. She was sitting up in her bouncer and giggling. But, by Friday, November 6, she was asleep most of the time. Doctors assured me she was just fighting off a chest infection and on Saturday her notes read 'stable'.

But I could see that her condition was deteriorating.

"By Sunday, a concerned hospital visitor told me that Hayley didn't look well and was clearly 'struggling to breathe'. Still, a cardiologist noted her condition down as 'stable', despite my pleas."

blocked lung

"On Monday, November 9, she was having so much trouble breathing, my dad begged for another chest X-ray. The X-ray, as we suspected, showed her left lung was blocked and the partial collapse of her right lung. A doctor ordered physiotherapy but it didn't come for 22 hours.

"By 1.30am the next morning, Hayley's breathing became so severe, a doctor agreed to X-ray her again. It showed her right lung was full of mucus and the left was 'compromised'. I begged a nurse to call intensive care but they refused, saying it 'wasn't an emergency'.

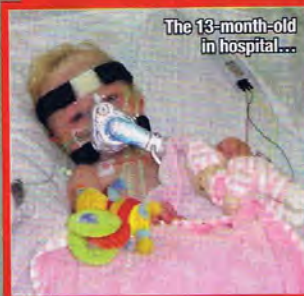
"My daughter is being overlooked and ignored! I told other parents, in



With Hayley after her birth in October 2009



Bobby and Paula celebrate Casey's



The 13-month-old in hospital...



...and in intensive care

A final attempt to get the attention I knew my little girl needed. Hayley was then placed in isolation as they feared swine flu, so I felt even more cut off.

"Her breathing didn't improve and her drip was failing five times every hour, but nobody came to fix it. My mum - so anxious about Hayley's wellbeing - begged a doctor to look at her lungs but was met with an abrupt response. We felt helpless and terrified.

"As the day turned to night, I could only sit and watch as Hayley worsened. She was supposed to be on hourly observations but her temperature wasn't taken

for nine hours. I had been awake 28 hours but I stayed awake all night, frightened to take my eyes off her.

"By 7am on November 11, her breathing monitor alarm sounded and a doctor rushed in. But she still wasn't transferred to intensive care. Within 40 minutes of the doctor leaving, I took one look at her and I knew things were more serious than I had even thought. Her little eyes rolled with a look of absolute terror. I think she knew, in that moment, she was dying.

"Somebody help! I gasped, as her mouth puckered like a fish out of water and her eyes rolled

back in her head. Fifteen medics from paediatric intensive care worked on her. They struggled to find an intravenous line to inject life-saving drugs and eight different doctors took it in turns to resuscitate her.

"Sorry, Mum, we've lost her," the doctor whispered after 20 minutes. The words stabbed me like I knife. I wasn't a mum. Not in that moment. Hayley was my only child and she was dead. I called Bobby, in Australia, and held the receiver to her cold cheek so he could say goodbye."

tiny coffin

"It is so hard to explain to anyone the devastation of losing a child like this. As we buried her in a tiny coffin, I made a promise that I would get answers.

"For three years, we've battled to bring the hospital to justice and, two weeks ago, Aidan Cotter, HM Coroner for Birmingham and Solihull, recorded a narrative verdict but confirmed the failings of the hospital were 'serious', although not 'gross'.

"He ruled that Hayley's medical charts were not maintained accurately and that the hospital should have questioned why she was on oxygen for so long. X-rays were not reviewed on time, he confirmed, and physiotherapy should have been carried out sooner.

"He also said that it was 'beyond doubt' that Hayley

should have been moved back to intensive care and that she would have had a 'better chance of survival' had she been. Birmingham Children's Hospital admitted full liability for her 'avoidable' death too and issued an apology.

"While proving what we knew to be true provides some closure, it doesn't bring Hayley back. The effects of her death were catastrophic. My mother was so traumatised by her death, she killed herself with an overdose last year. She just couldn't live without her granddaughter. I miss her so much but I like to think she's up there, looking after Hayley.

"Bobby and I tried for another baby as we knew it was the only way we could heal our grief. Casey, now 19 months, who's named after our doctor in Belfast, was born without problems and is the spitting image of Hayley. One day we will tell her all about her big sister.

"I'm now campaigning for rapid response systems to be set up in hospitals, allowing parents an urgent second opinion when their child is ill. These response systems are already in place at Royal Berkshire hospital and are not overused or abused in any way by patients. We hope to encourage other hospitals to follow suit to stop this happening to anybody else."

CHARLOTTE MARTIN

Irwin Mitchell solicitors represented Paula and her family. Visit www.irwinmitchell.com. For Paula's campaign, see www.heal-trust.org

'No other family will experience this again'

A spokesperson from Birmingham Children's Hospital offered a sincere apology to Hayley's family.

"When Hayley died, we recognised that some of her care fell below some of our usual high standards, and for this we offer our heartfelt apology for the

distress which has been caused. We have taken all the steps possible to learn from this - we've gone beyond the recommendations of our investigation and improved the way we do things to ensure that no children or families experience anything like this again."

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