# Inquest reveals delays in care contributed to student's death



An inquest into the death of 22-year-old William Hewes revealed that delays in administering antibiotics at Homerton University Hospital may have contributed to his tragic demise. William, a student at Leeds University, passed away just hours after being admitted to the hospital on January 21, 2023. His mother, Deborah Burns, is a paediatric consultant at the same hospital, complicating an already heartbreaking situation for the family.

During the inquest, it was disclosed that William had been suffering from headaches, a fever, and blurred vision while working on a university essay. His condition deteriorated, prompting his mother to take him to the Accident and Emergency department just after midnight. Burns expressed her belief to the medical staff that her son was suffering from meningococcal sepsis, a severe bacterial infection that can be life-threatening without timely treatment.

Despite her persistent requests for immediate administration of antibiotics within the first hour, there was a delay due to a misunderstanding between the attending doctor and nursing staff. Consequently, William did not receive the antibiotics until 1.25 am, nearly an hour and a half after he arrived. In the interim, he was treated with fluids, morphine, paracetamol, and anti-nausea medication.

Coroner Mary Hassell, who presided over the inquest, stated that while William was indeed not treated with the urgency warranted for his condition, it remains unclear whether earlier intervention would have saved his life. She concluded, "I am not convinced, even on the balance of probabilities, that the state of medical knowledge is such that we know the answer to the question of whether William would have survived had he received earlier treatment."

The medical cause of death was diagnosed as meningococcal septicaemia. Following the inquest, Dr Burns expressed her hopes for the outcome to contribute to improvements in the care provided to people experiencing sepsis. "I hope that the outcome of the coroner's inquest can lead to learning and improvement to the care of people with sepsis in the future," she remarked.

In response to the inquest's findings, Homerton Healthcare NHS Trust acknowledged the coroner's comments regarding the urgency of treatment. They expressed their intent to share lessons learned from this tragic case with NHS colleagues nationwide. The Trust also recognised the compounded impact of William’s death on his mother, emphasising their determination to improve policies and procedures for situations involving staff members and their families receiving care.

As William's family continues to mourn their loss, the inquest highlights critical aspects of hospital protocols and the importance of timely medical intervention.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/icu-london-b2722700.html> - This article supports the claim that William Hewes died at Homerton University Hospital after being admitted with symptoms of meningococcal sepsis, and the delay in administering antibiotics was noted during the inquest.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/icu-london-b2722700.html> - It highlights the coroner's conclusion that despite the delay in treatment, it remains uncertain whether earlier intervention would have saved William's life.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sepsis/> - This NHS resource explains the importance of timely medical intervention for meningococcal sepsis, supporting the urgency emphasized in William Hewes' case.
* <https://sepsistrust.org/> - The UK Sepsis Trust emphasizes the critical need for prompt recognition and treatment of sepsis, aligning with Dr. Burns' advocacy for improved care following the inquest.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-> - This BBC page on health could provide general information on the importance of rapid treatment for sepsis, similar to the situation with William Hewes.