

Doctors said Charlotte had caught swine flu. They were wrong...

9 days later she died

Helen and Karl Hartey's daughter Charlotte, 16, died of tonsillitis after a misdiagnosis. They reveal to *Woman's Own* how they're fighting back

As swine flu continues to sweep across Britain, many of us are calling the 24-hour helplines. Banned from doctors' surgeries in a bid to stop the deadly flu spreading, phoning is our only way to seek treatment. That's what Charlotte Hartey's parents did when she woke up with a sore throat. Her mum Helen called their family doctor

who told them she had swine flu. 'I trusted his opinion. He's a trained professional,' Helen exclusively tells *Woman's Own*. But the doctor was wrong. Just nine days later, Charlotte was dead. The Tamiflu tablets she'd been prescribed to fight the flu were useless as, incredibly, Charlotte never had swine flu. She'd been suffering from tonsillitis – easily treatable with

antibiotics if caught early on. Dad Karl, an investment adviser, tells us, 'The government has blood on its hands. They're telling people not to see their doctors in person. If Charlotte had been properly examined she'd still be alive.' But, like so many of us, the



OUR BUBBLY DAUGHTER
Karl and Helen with Charlotte on their last holiday in San Francisco

Hartey family had no cause to question their doctor when their daughter first fell ill. 'Charlotte was looking forward to the summer holidays after finishing her GCSEs. She wanted to be an architect and couldn't wait to start her A levels,' a tearful Helen explains. But then, this July, she started to feel ill. 'It was the school holidays and like any teenager, she hated getting up before lunchtime, so we weren't too worried at first,' says Karl. 'But when she didn't want to go out and see her friends, we knew something was wrong.' By 22 July, Charlotte was groggy and told her brother, Tristan, 19, her throat felt 'scratchy' and 'sore'. 'I insisted

we call the doctor,' says Helen. But the doctor told them not to come in. 'He asked if she had a temperature, felt nauseous and had a sore throat. I said yes to all three,' says Helen. 'He spoke to Charlotte, then he told me she was swine flu. Of course, I assumed he was right.' Helen picked up Tamiflu tablets from a centre near their home in Weston Rhyn, Shropshire, and Charlotte took the first tablet that night. 'She was violently sick. She couldn't even keep fluids down,' Helen tells us. So the next morning they called the surgery again and a different doctor agreed to visit. 'He took a quick look at her and said her throat was swollen,'



There are 15,000 signatures on the petition

RAISING AWARENESS

Words: Melanie Smith/Anna Cook Photos: PA Photos



Charlotte was looking forward to the summer

evening Helen and Karl watched the sunset with her and at 11pm kissed her goodnight.

But the family was woken at 2.30am by a call from the hospital. The doctor explained, 'Charlotte's breathing's got worse. She's in intensive care.'

Terrified, they raced to the hospital as Charlotte was taken to theatre to put a tube in her throat, to help her breath. It should have been a simple procedure. But doctors made another discovery.

'They told us her lungs were filling with blood from an abscess caused by the tonsillitis. Soon she developed septicaemia, too. It felt like a bad dream,' says Karl.

Just half an hour after coming out of theatre, Charlotte was dead — her distraught family by her side. 'We couldn't imagine life without our bubbly daughter,' says Helen.

A week later, after a post-mortem, the family heard Charlotte had died from complications from tonsillitis. Worse, she'd never had swine flu. By treating that virus for nine days, her real condition was left untreated.

On 13 August this year, Helen and Karl had to bury their beloved daughter. 'We had the

service at midday, as Charlotte was never a morning person,' says Helen, sadly.

Now, the whole family are struggling to rebuild their shattered lives. But they're determined Charlotte's death

won't be in vain, by urging others to demand to see a doctor and not to rely on advice over the phone.

'With swine flu raging, if someone has only a few symptoms, they're diagnosed with it. This happened to our daughter,' says Helen.

'Once she had the diagnosis, no doctor wanted to challenge it.

And now she's no longer with us.'

To help make more of us aware of the dangers of being misdiagnosed, Karl and Helen have set up the Charlotte Hartey Foundation, with a petition against telephone diagnoses by GPs and call centres. They already have 15,000 signatures.

'It won't bring Charlotte back,' says Helen. 'But if it saves one family the heartache we've been through, then it will have been worth it.'

● For more information, go to www.charlottehartey.com



At a prom to celebrate the end of her GCSEs with childhood friend Joe, 16, taken weeks before she died

says Helen. 'But he confirmed the first diagnosis. He told Charlotte that she'd feel alright by the end of the weekend.'

At first it seemed he was right. By Saturday she was even able to eat some soup. But on Sunday she complained of chest pains. A third doctor arrived on Monday morning and took some swabs.

'When the results came through on Wednesday, the doctor phoned. He told me, "Take your daughter to hospital. Her white blood cell count is very high. She's fighting a very serious infection,"' says Helen.

When they got to the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, within an hour, doctors made a shocking revelation.

'They pulled the curtain around Charlotte's bed and said that, in fact, she had tonsillitis. Karl and I were angry she'd been

wrongly diagnosed, but we were relieved,' says Helen.

'At Charlotte's bed I placed a teddy bear and whispered, "You'll be home in no time." And she nodded.'

The next day, Charlotte seemed to be getting better. That

SWINE FLU: THE FACTS

- Telephone helplines are still the only way to get diagnosed. You will only be able to see your GP if you are pregnant or have underlying health conditions.
- The government estimates the number of cases have leapt to 9,000 a week, but they admit there's a 'considerable amount of uncertainty' because figures are based on the number of people who've called the

- helplines or visited their GP — they rarely test in the lab now.
- Symptoms are so similar to traditional flu, it can be impossible to tell the difference.
- Some people



Swine flu treatment

have admitted to faking their symptoms to stock up on Tamiflu.

Symptoms to look out for
 ✓ A high temperature (over 38°C)
 ✓ Aching muscles
 ✓ A sore throat and/or dry cough
 Even if you do have swine flu, most people recover within a week, even without treatment. First call 0800 151 3513.

If you're still not satisfied or if symptoms have not cleared up in five to seven days, you should insist on a second opinion.