

Mum's heartbreak

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO MY GIRL?

A medical mystery has a teen needled

This time last year, Kate Robson was a bubbly and energetic teen who loved going to school and hanging out with her friends. Shaving her hair off to fundraise for cancer – a disease her mum battled many years ago – Kate was blissfully unaware that in a few months' time, she would be fighting an unknown and aggressive illness of her own.

"All of a sudden, my darling girl became really withdrawn, angry and agitated," explains Kate's mum Deb.

The Aucklanders did all the usual checks any mother would do – asked if she was being bullied or having a hard time at school – but Kate, now 13, couldn't explain what was wrong.

Kate's nightmare started with weird dreams. Then came the hallucinations. "I kept it to myself for a while because I didn't want to sound like a crazy person," Kate remembers. "But it got so bad, I thought I actually must be going mental. I was seeing people who weren't there. I was so scared."

After confessing to her mum last October, Deb called their family doctor and a crisis team was sent around to the house.

They were so concerned that they admitted Kate to Starship hospital's mental health ward in Auckland, where she would remain for the next two months.

"It was such a horrible time," Deb recalls. "She was in such a

dark place mentally that she wouldn't even let me see her for most of that time."

Deb was called to the hospital on a few occasions because Kate had been caught trying to hurt herself. "I used to wake up every morning and pray she was still alive," Deb says. "It was like she was possessed. I kept thinking, 'Where has my little girl gone?'"

Scans showed Kate's brain was swelling, which explained the psychosis, splitting headaches and short-term memory loss. But how it occurred was something the doctors couldn't pinpoint.

They suggested it was possibly a form of limbic encephalitis, a rare disease characterised by inflammation of the brain, which is caused by the body producing antibodies against itself. Most cases in females are caused by tumours in the ovaries or breasts, but Kate's tests turned up clear.

She was put on a round of chemotherapy in the hope of killing off the bad antibodies, but Kate didn't respond well and, instead of getting better, she got worse.

After two months in hospital and weeks of ongoing treatment, trials and tests, Deb had a sudden realisation – seven months earlier, her daughter had been given her first round of the HPV vaccine at school.

The vaccine, also known as Gardasil, is offered free under the public health system and is used to protect against the human papillomavirus, a major cause

of cervical cancer. There are three injections spaced out over six or seven months.

"I've always been firmly in the pro-vaccination camp and didn't think twice about signing Kate's permission slip. I've battled cervical cancer myself, so it was a no-brainer," Deb explains.

Shock reaction

Then Kate, who had previously been a healthy teen and never spent any time in hospital, suddenly became very ill.

She was hospitalised within three weeks after each round of the vaccination. The first time, she got a virus and had paralysis in her arms and legs. The second time, she developed pneumonia, and the third time was when her brain started swelling, causing the psychosis.

"I just thought we were having one of those years, but I felt sick to my stomach when I finally connected the dots," explains Deb.

While there has been no scientific or medical proof to back up Deb's suspicions, there have been many deaths blamed on the controversial vaccine overseas, including a number of reported mystery illnesses, and at least one death here in New Zealand.

The doctors and specialists working with Kate believe her illness has no link to the vaccine.

"I can't explain why only some girls react to the vaccine and others don't – all I know is that it seems my girl did," tells Deb.

The mother-daughter duo are



Kate, who shaved her hair for cancer research, seemed "possessed" after her jabs.



now seeing a cranial osteopath, as well as one of the country's leading holistic health practitioners, who has put her on high-dose intravenous vitamin C, plus a raft of other natural-based medications.

"We are going through a complete overhaul of her diet as well – no gluten, sugar or dairy. It's tough, but we are seeing massive improvements already," explains Deb. "It's going to be a long road to recovery, but I know I'll get my girl back eventually –

Mum Deb says it's going to be a long road to recovery, but Kate is already showing some improvement.



we are on the right path now.”

The decision to take Kate out of the public health system was a pricey one, with her new treatments costing almost \$800 per week. A Givealittle page was set up by a friend to help pay for Kate's weekly costs, which Deb says has been a lifesaver.

“We don't have a spare \$800 a week lying around, so I don't know what I would have done without that – we are so grateful.”

Kate's new treatment plan is about getting rid of the toxicity

in her body and reducing the swelling of her brain, while building her immune system back up.

Word of warning

“We'll never know with absolute certainty if the vaccine caused all this, but I feel in my heart that it did and the new practitioners we are seeing agree,” Deb insists. “I'm not one to shove my beliefs down people's throats – all I ask is that parents look into this vaccine before blindly agreeing, like I did.

I wish I'd done my own research.”

Kate's case has been put forward to the Centre of Adverse Reactions, although Deb isn't hopeful anything will come of it. She has been in touch with other mums who believe their daughters have had severe reactions to the vaccine and is hoping to set up a support group.

“We're not out of the woods yet, but I can see a faint light at the end of the tunnel – and after the year of hell we've had, that's pretty amazing.”

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HPV FACT BOX

- ◆ The HPV vaccine (Gardasil) has been licenced for use in more than 100 countries, including New Zealand, Australia, the United States, Canada and countries in the European Union.
- ◆ It protects against four strains of human papillomavirus responsible for cervical and some other cancers, and genital warts.
- ◆ It is given as three injections, spaced out over several months and the protection is long-lasting.
- ◆ Immunisation is offered for free for girls under 20, through school or from a GP.
- ◆ Around 150 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 50 women die from it each year in New Zealand.