

Mother believes condition lead to 31-year-old taking his own life

Son's illness to feature in TV hospital drama

By Joanna Till

joanna.till@essnmedia.co.uk

WHEN her son Chris took his own life three summers ago, Joanna Lane vowed to not rest until she had some answers as to why.

Her family's search uncovered a condition called hypopituitarism, which she believes contributed to his decision to kill himself.

She has dedicated her life since then to raising awareness of the disease.

The 62-year-old has sent thousands of e-mails to hospitals, doctors, rehabilitation centres and politicians and next week the condition will feature in an episode of BBC drama *Holby City* after she contacted script writers.

"I just want something positive to come out of what happened to this family," said Mrs Lane, 62, who lives on Southwood Avenue in Coulsdon.

"It is a great forum for this kind of thing and it has a huge audience."

Hypopituitarism is a condition where the pituitary gland in the brain does not produce one or more type of hormone, which can lead to depression.

Symptoms range from impot-



NOT FORGOTTEN: Chris Lane

ence and infertility to extreme lethargy, stunted growth or weight gain, while a failure to produce adrenaline leaves people unable to cope with stress.

The condition can be triggered by a mild or severe head injury, with symptoms often delayed for decades.

Mrs Lane, a retired English teacher, believes Chris suffered damage to his pituitary gland after he fell from a tree at Godstone Farm in Surrey aged seven.

He was in a coma for a week and in hospital for three, but went on to make what Mrs Lane and her consultant husband John, 61, be-

lieved to be a full recovery.

He went to Smitham Primary School, Cumnor House and Whitgift School, and studied engineering at Birmingham University before moving to North Yorkshire to work for Skipton Building Society.

After 31-year-old Chris, an IT specialist, took his own life on August 26, 2008, Mrs Lane discovered he was impotent and had been receiving treatment for depression.

Conditions

She believes these conditions are symptoms of hypopituitarism, caused by his earlier head injury, but the pathologist did not examine Chris's pituitary.

Hypopituitarism is seldom diagnosed, which Mrs Lane believes is because doctors are not sufficiently aware that one in four head injuries cause the condition.

"The most heartbreaking thing of all is that this could have been treated and would have been treated if we had been told what to look out for," Mrs Lane said.

"In the 1980s hardly anybody knew about the condition, but if we could only have been told when he was discharged from hospital



ONE-WOMAN CAMPAIGN: Joanna Lane

as a child that this was a risk then we would have been so vigilant."

Mrs Lane believes head injury patients should be screened for pituitary damage, and warned about the condition in their discharge letters.

Her one-woman campaign has resulted in NHS Direct, Headway and the Pituitary Foundation giving the information, but she said

more needs to be done.

"We are not talking about small numbers, this is about 30,000 new cases each year," she said.

"This is a great opportunity for all these professionals to come together to save lives, so I cannot understand why more isn't being done."

■ *Holby City* will air at 8pm on Tuesday next week.