

→ Mike.

The Times
7 November 2002
Page 3

Shipman-style inquiry into 50 deaths at hospital

By Michael Horsnell
and Russell Jenkins

AN EXPERT in the use of diamorphine, the heroin-based painkiller, is to be appointed by police conducting an investigation into the suspicious deaths of more than 50 elderly patients at a community hospital.

Relatives allege that the drug, used by Harold Shipman to kill many of his patients, was over-prescribed at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital in Hampshire. Detectives are preparing to interview relatives of those who died at the 180-bed hospital amid claims of unlawful killing.

Many patients died while receiving recuperative care under a regime in which prescriptions for morphine and other potent drugs were regularly written in advance so that nurses could administer them unsupervised.

Ann Alexander, a solicitor who represented more than 300 families in the Shipman inquiry, had a two-hour meeting with Detective Chief Superintendent Steve Watts of Hampshire police and his deputy Nigel Neven yesterday.

She said: "It was a very productive meeting. They have completely reassured me about their intentions to do whatever they can to get to the bottom of whatever has been going on at this hospital."

After complaints by some relatives that police had failed to respond fully to initial concerns, it was disclosed that officers will examine how Greater Manchester Police put together the Shipman inquiry, notably its use of expert witnesses. Ms Alexander said: "Police want to see every single family that wishes to see them. They are hoping that anyone who has not been in touch and who has concerns

should come forward."

The meeting, at her office in Altrincham, Greater Manchester, came after worried families contacted a helpline established by health managers. A total of 57 people attended a public meeting held by Alexander Harris, solicitors, on Sunday to hear concerns about treatment at the hospital dating back to the early 1990s.

The law firm represents relatives of 27 elderly patients who died at the hospital and one who survived, but there are believed to be at least as many again whom detectives want to contact.

Among the cases under investigation are those of Leonard Graham, 75, who was recovering from pneumonia. Another, Betty Rogers, 67, was recovering from a chest infection. Her daughter was urged to go home, having been told her mother was not near death. Fifteen minutes later she received a call saying her mother had died.

Other deaths under investigation include those of Stanley Carby, 65, Eva Page, 88, and Dulcie Middleton, 85.

The hospital has already been the subject of an investigation by the Commission for Health Improvement, which criticised its prescribing practices. Although a commission report said that it could not look at any particular death, it found doses of up to 200 milligrams a day of morphine were being administered by pumps.

In September the government's chief medical officer commissioned a clinical audit. Professor Richard Baker, who worked on the Shipman inquiry, was appointed to examine death rates at the hospital.

In the same month the chief executives responsible for man-

aging the hospital at the time of the deaths were suspended. Ian Piper, of Fareham and Gosport Primary Care Trust, and Tony Horne, of East Hampshire Primary Care Trust, were redeployed to other duties.

The suspensions were prompted after internal documents from 1991 — prior to the deaths — were uncovered which highlighted concerns about prescribing practices at the hospital. The hospital has moved to reassure current patients by appointing an experienced senior nurse from another area to oversee and review patient care.

Jane Barton, who was in charge of the day-to-day treatment of some elderly patients at the hospital until July 2000, was referred to the General Medical Council in September. A consultant geriatrician and seven nurses are also the subject of complaints about the dead patients' treatment.

There is no suggestion that Dr Barton, who has refused to comment, or any of the others who worked at the hospital, deliberately caused harm.

The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Health Authority said: "It is important to note that whilst the CHI investigation had some serious concerns about services in the past, it concluded that policies and procedures are now in place to ensure safe standards of care at the hospital."

Hampshire police said: "Detective Chief Superintendent Steve Watts today had a meeting with Alexander Harris in Altrincham who are representing the families of people who died at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital. Senior members of his investigating team were at the meeting. The investigation is ongoing."



Gospot
08/056

The Times
5 November 2002
Page 5

Police investigate deaths of 30 elderly patients

By Stewart Tendler
Crime Correspondent

POLICE are investigating the hospital care of up to 30 elderly patients after relatives complained that they may have died from overdoses of powerful painkillers.

The families have hired the solicitor who represented many of the relatives in the Shipman case to put the argument for a full public inquiry into the deaths.

All of the patients who died were admitted to Gosport War Memorial Hospital in Hampshire to recuperate, and their families were told that they should make a full recovery.

The police investigations are centred on the use of painkillers, including diamorphine, and sedatives at the 108-bed hospital near Portsmouth.

Hampshire police and health officials originally opened an inquiry into a single case at the cottage hospital, but the inquiry expanded to 13 deaths between 1997 and 2000. It now goes back into the early 1990s. Police confirmed yesterday that more families had come forward after recent publicity about the investigation. The force refused to say how many, but at least 27 families have joined a campaign group.

The local health authority has received between 40 and

50 calls from worried relatives on a helping and some have been referred to the police.

The police have already investigated the hospital and sent a report to the Crown Prosecution Service, which decided that there was insufficient evidence for any charges. Police then called in the Commission for Health Improvement, the hospital watchdog.

The commission's inspectors could not determine whether the drugs prescribed had contributed to any deaths. They criticised the use of diamorphine combined with a strong anaesthetic and another drug usually used for schizophrenia. That combination "could carry a risk of excessive sedation and respiratory depression in older patients".

Dr Liam Donaldson, the Chief Medical Officer, has asked Professor Richard Baker, who worked on the Shipman case, to carry out a study into the hospital's death rate.

Dr Jane Barton, who was in charge of the day-to-day treatment of some elderly patients at the hospital until July 2000, was referred to the General Medical Council in September. A consultant geriatrician and seven nurses are also the subject of complaints about the dead patients' treatment, but there is no suggestion that any of them deliberately harmed any patient.

The Daily Telegraph

5 November 2002

Page 5

Painkiller death inquiry extends to 50 cases

BY STEWART PAYNE

AN investigation into the deaths of elderly patients suspected of being killed by the overuse of painkillers at a hospital has widened to include almost 50 cases, police said yesterday.

Another 30 families have come forward since it was announced that detectives and health officials were examining 19 complaints

about care and treatment of patients at the War Memorial Hospital, Gosport, Hants.

They believe their relatives might have died as a result of the overuse of drugs, including diamorphine, used by the mass killer Harold Shipman.

Ann Alexander, a solicitor who won a court order to force the Government to hold an inquiry into the Shipman case, will lead the families' calls for a full investigation. She is due to meet police

tomorrow.

Professor Sir Liam Donaldson, the chief medical officer, has asked Richard Baker, a Leicester University professor who worked on the Shipman case, to hold an audit into the deaths at the hospital in the 1990s.

The inquiry, due to report in the New Year, will examine a hospital document from 1991 that is said to warn of the overuse of morphine.

All the patients who died

were admitted to the hospital to recuperate from various operations and treatments. Relatives were told they were expected to make a full recovery.

At this stage there is no suggestion that any patient was harmed deliberately.

A Health Department spokesman said: "Every single aspect of the deaths will be explored in Prof Baker's study."

The Independent

5 November 2002

Page 6

Fifty families complain of hospital in death inquiry

A HOSPITAL at the centre of an inquiry into its high death rate has attracted complaints from up to 50 families who contacted a helpline, it was disclosed yesterday.

Gosport War Memorial hospital, Hampshire, is the subject of a Department of Health investigation into allegations that the painkiller morphine was inappropriately used on elderly patients, after complaints were made by 13 families.

Solicitors for the families said more people had come forward after health managers set up the helpline and appealed for information through local newspapers. A total of 27 families attended a meeting on Sunday night.

In a statement, the solicitors Alexander Harris said the families wanted a proper investigation and inquiry into events at the hospital.

It said: "All but one of those present [at the meeting] had lost a loved one taken unex-

pectedly and suddenly ill while undergoing rehabilitation or other treatment in one of three wards at the hospital.

"Many of these had died after being given diamorphine for relief of alleged pain. A number of those who died were only a short time earlier on the road to recovery and expected to be soon well enough to be discharged home.

"Numerous relatives had subsequently made complaints to police, the General Medical Council, Nursing & Midwifery Council, Hospital Trust and Health Authority."

The inquiry was ordered by Sir Liam Donaldson, the Government's chief medical officer, in September to establish whether "patterns of death were out of line with what would be expected". It followed complaints from families of patients admitted between

1997 and 2000. The inquiry is being carried out by Richard Baker, professor of clinical governance at Leicester University, who conducted the audit of GP Harold Shipman's records which revealed him as a serial killer.

The hospital has already been the subject of an investigation by the Commission for Health Improvement, the Government's health watchdog. It found that the use of pain relieving and sedative drugs had at times been excessive.

It said the use of diamorphine combined with a strong anaesthetic and another drug usually used to treat schizophrenia "could carry a risk of excessive sedation and respiratory depression in older patients, leading to death".

However, the investigation was unable to say whether the death rate at the hospital was excessive.

The police also conducted an inquiry after receiving a complaint from Gillian Mackenzie, whose mother Gladys died and

91 in 1998. Mrs Richards received a cocktail of painkillers which should not have been used together.

Hampshire police sent a file on the case to the Crown Prosecution Service, which decided not to prosecute because of a lack of evidence. But a dozen other families came forward in March 2001 with concerns about the deaths of their relatives.

In announcing the health department inquiry in September, Professor Donaldson said: "Even though both previous investigations have found no grounds for serious concern, neither was in a position to establish whether trends and patterns of deaths were out of line with what was to be expected."

Yesterday a spokesman for Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority confirmed "between 40 and 50 people" had contacted the helpline with a range of concerns. Several of those people had contacted police with allegations over patient care

The Mirror
05 November 2002

Probe on 50 deaths

POLICE were last night investigating the deaths of up to 50 elderly hospital patients who may have been given overdoses of the drug used by mass killer Harold Shipman.

Distraught families have come forward after health officials set up a special helpline at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital in Hampshire.

Relatives of victims believe overdoses of drugs including the painkiller diamorphine used by Shipman to murder at least 215 people were responsible.

But there is no suggestion at this stage that any of the patients was harmed deliberately.

The Sun
05 November 2002
Page 2

NHS deaths: 50 families raise fears

FIFTY more families have raised concerns about a hospital being investigated over patient deaths, it was revealed last night.

The Chief Medical Officer ordered the probe into Gosport War Memorial Hospital in Hampshire after the deaths of 13 elderly patients between 1997 and 2000.

It is headed by the professor involved in the Harold Shipman inquiry.

Now around 50 people worried about the care of relatives have contacted a helpline set up by the local health authority.

Police have been investigating the deaths and allegations over the use of the painkiller diamorphine. No action has been taken.

A meeting of bereaved families, who believe the deaths were suspicious, called for a full inquiry.