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HEALTH: Government watchdog starts investigation after case of unlawful killing is dropped

Hospital at centre of probe into patient care

by Rebecca Ellnor and Michael Short
The News

A GOVERNMENT health watchdog has launched an investigation into the care of elderly people at a Gosport hospital.

Officials from the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) will start the probe at Gosport War Memorial Hospital in the wake of a six-month police investigation into an allegation of the unlawful killing of an elderly patient.

Officers were today looking at whether to continue lines of inquiry or to hand over the matter to the CHI.

As exclusively revealed by *The News*, the hospital was at the centre of an allegation of unlawful killing.

Gladys Richards, 91, from Lee-on-the-Solent, died at the hospital in 1996 but her daughter Gillian Mackenzie was not satisfied by the standard of care her mother received.

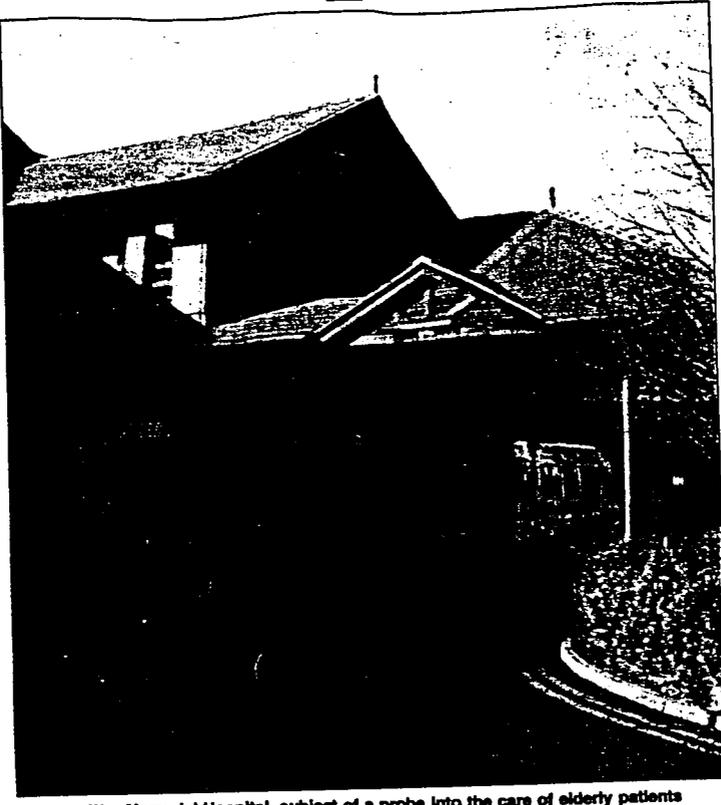
But after the Crown Prosecution Service spent six months scrutinising a file prepared by detectives into Mrs Richard's death, that case was dropped.

Now, following the publicity surrounding the case and other allegations relating to the care of elderly patients, as well as information passed on from the police, the government watchdog will investigate the hospital.

Today Mrs Mackenzie, from East Sussex, said: 'If there is an investigation under way then my general reaction is "about time too". I'm glad they are looking into this but I am convinced this should be put before a judge and jury.'

Detective Superintendent John James, who has been leading inquiries at the hospital, said the force was still weighing up what action to take.

Gosport MP Peter Viggers said: 'In the many years that I have been member of Parliament for Gosport I have had nothing but praise for Gosport War Memorial hospital.'



Gosport War Memorial Hospital, subject of a probe into the care of elderly patients



Elizabeth Fradd

Director leads investigation

THE government investigation into the Gosport War Memorial Hospital will be headed by Elizabeth Fradd.

Mrs Fradd is director of nursing at the Commission for Health Improvement.

Recently appointed an honorary member of the Faculty of Public Health, she has practised as a general, children's and midwifery nurse. She has served as director of nursing and education at the NHS Executive West Midlands regional office and as assistant chief nursing officer at the Department of Health.

Mrs Fradd is to become a fellow of the Queen's Nursing Institute.

The commission will not reopen any criminal inquiry but it will investigate standard of care provided for the elderly.

In particular, it will look at arrangements for the administering of drugs, responsibility of patient care and the transfer of patients between the war memorial hospital and other hospitals.

The review will last about 24 weeks and will involve a week-long visit to the hospital by a team of inspectors.

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Looking for evidence

AN investigation was launched this year following a complaint from Gladys Richards' family.

Detectives interviewed a number of medical staff before sending a file to the Crown Prosecution Service.

see if there was enough evidence to bring a prosecution for unlawful killing. It was understood the investigation concentrated on the use of the pain-killing drug diamorphine.

In July, CPS lawyers decided there should be no prosecution.

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