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HEALTH: Senior detectives investigate events surrounding other patients' death.

Elderly woman's death: doctors will not be prosecuted

by Jonathan Carter
The News

LAWYERS have ruled that there is not enough evidence to prosecute any doctor over the death of a 91-year-old woman at a Gosport hospital.

The Crown Prosecution Service spent six months scrutinising a file prepared by detectives into allegations that Gladys Richards from Lee-on-the-Solent was unlawfully killed at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

Suspicions later emerged over the way the painkilling drug diamorphine was used in treating elderly patients there.

Today Mrs Richards's daughter, Gillian Mackenzie, confirmed that lawyers had not found enough evidence to support a prosecution. Police have now drawn a line under the investigation into Mrs Richards's death.

But senior detectives said they were now looking into the events surrounding the

State-of-the-art facilities

GOSPORT War Memorial Hospital was built in April 1923 in memory of those who lost their lives in the first world war.

It provides services for elderly patients – including those with mental health problems – as well as mothers and babies on the Blake maternity unit.

When the hospital opened it had just 26 beds. Since then it has more than trebled in size.

In the 1980s it was threatened with closure under a health service shake-up – but a huge public campaign helped



Gosport War Memorial Hospital

convince hospital chiefs to keep it open

In fact a £10m revamp was ordered expanding the size of the hospital and giving it a range of state-of-the-art facilities.

deaths of other elderly patients at the War Memorial.

Mrs Mackenzie believes if these probes throw up new evidence, Mrs Richards's death may be looked at again. Detective Superintendent John James, based at Fratton station, said:

'Following the publicity concerning the inquiry into

Mrs Richards's death, a number of members of the public contacted us expressing concerns about the circumstances of deaths of relatives at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.'

'We can confirm we are conducting preliminary inquiries to determine whether or not the matters

should be subject of a more intensive investigation. That process is more concerned with us assuring ourselves that there is no need to widen the investigation.'

Det Supt James would not reveal how many elderly patients were involved. Mrs Richards died on August 19, 1998, after being transferred to the War Memorial from Royal Hospital Haslar, where she'd had a hip operation. An internal inquiry triggered by a complaint from her family found no member of staff at fault.

But in a letter to Mrs Mackenzie, Portsmouth Healthcare (NHS) Trust apologised for failings in the service. Police later interviewed a number of hospital staff but made no arrests.

Ian Piper, operations director of the trust, said: 'We are reassured that the CPS has not found evidence to pursue a prosecution. We have every confidence in the staff at Gosport War Memorial Hospital and the care that they provide.'