

Portsmouth News 7<sup>th</sup> April 2001**INQUIRY:** Families will be interviewed by detectives after relatives come forward

# Police to probe three more hospital deaths

by Jonathan Carter  
The News

**DETECTIVES** are to investigate the deaths of three more patients at a Gosport hospital.

Relatives of the three pensioners approached police after *The News* revealed that senior officers have investigated claims that a 91-year-old woman was unlawfully killed at Gosport War Memorial Hospital in 1998.

Detectives have passed a file on that case to the Crown Prosecution Service and are awaiting guidance from lawyers on how to proceed.

It is understood that the new inquiries involve concerns voiced by relatives over doses of the pain-killing drug diamorphine which were given to the elderly patients.

Police spokeswoman Pauline Davey confirmed detectives involved in the initial inquiry into alleged unlawful killing were to interview the families after they 'voiced concerns' to the force.

'It will form part of the same operation,' she added.

Today Mike Wilson, one of those at the centre of the fresh inquiries, said he had protested to a health watchdog that his mother, also 91, fell into a 'trance-like' state before she died at the War Memorial in December 1998.

Edna Purnell, who lived in Lee-on-the-Solent, had been sent there to recuperate after a hip operation at Gosport's Royal Hospital Haslar.

The health service ombudsman, who later examined a complaint by her son Mike Wilson against Portsmouth HealthCare (NHS) Trust, cleared the hospital of any blame for her death.

The ombudsman concluded: 'I have not found evidence of unsatisfactory medical or

## Son remains concerned over mother's treatment

MIKE Wilson says he remains concerned by the death of his 91-year-old mother despite the findings of the health service ombudsman.

The 64-year-old, of Hammond Court, Gosport, took his complaint to the Independent watchdog after a series of disputes with senior management at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

He claimed his mother did not receive reasonable medical and nursing care after her transfer from Haslar on November 11, 1998, 24 days before she died.

He also alleged that doses of morphine she was given at the War Memorial were excessive.

In response, Portsmouth HealthCare (NHS) Trust - which runs the War Memorial - 'wholly rejected' his allegation that his mother was 'helped on her way'.

The ombudsman said that staff at the hospital had to strike a balance between doing all they could to help her rehabilitation and not doing anything that would cause her unnecessary suffering.

nursing care, and I am satisfied that Mrs Purnell was not given excessive doses of morphine.'

But the report criticised the hospital for the way in which some of Mrs Purnell's medical notes were destroyed. It said: 'The early destruction of the records was contrary to the trust's own policy and went against official guidance.'

The trust expressed their deep regret for what had hap-



Edna Purnell: Care

The report found: 'It appeared to Mr Wilson that his mother was improving up to the time she was transferred to the second hospital (the War Memorial). His hopes may have been heightened by the consultant's plan "for a month's gentle rehabilitation" and the prospect of her eventually going to a nursing home.'

'It is entirely understandable, therefore, that he was greatly upset by the changes so soon after Mrs Purnell's move to the second hospital.'

pened and said that it was the only time such an error had been made.'

Detectives will also scrutinise events surrounding the death at the hospital last September of Jack Williamson, 81, who lived in Rowner Lane, Gosport. His son Ian, 48, of Netley Abbey, said Mr Williamson had died just days after his wife Ivy, 76.

He said: 'My mother had terminal cancer and was going to die. But with my dad I



Mike Wilson took his complaint to the ombudsman

can't understand. When he died they said that he had given up, but to be dead within a week of my mum dying just seemed to be rather strange.'

A Fareham widow has also approached police over the death of her elderly husband at the War Memorial.

HealthCare Trust operations director Ian Piper said that the hospital would fully co-operate with the new police investigations.



War Memorial Hospital

