

Suspicious deaths at Gosport War Memorial hospital to be reviewed

Former bishop of Liverpool will lead inquiry into the deaths of a number of elderly patients at the hospital from 1988-2000

Press Association

Thursday 10 July 2014 12.40 BST

A formal review has been launched into a number of suspicious deaths at a hospital.

Norman Lamb, minister for care and support, announced that an inquiry is to be held into the deaths of a number of elderly patients at Gosport War Memorial hospital in Hampshire between 1988 and 2000.

The investigation will be led by the Right Rev James Jones, former bishop of Liverpool, who previously chaired the Hillsborough independent panel. He has already begun work with the affected families.

The investigation, which is expected to take around two years, will review the evidence held by a number of organisations, Lamb said. He added that the terms of reference for the review would be published in the autumn.

A separate review into the deaths of patients at the Southern Health NHS foundation trust hospital between 1988 and 2000 was published last year - 10 years after it was completed.

The report, led by Professor Richard Baker of Leicester University, could not be published in full before then because of police investigations and inquests being held.

Baker found that the "almost routine use of opiates" for elderly patients "almost certainly had shortened the lives of some patients" and suggested that a number could have eventually gone on to make full recoveries.

Concerns were first raised about care at the hospital in 1998, with Prof Baker's review noting that the practice of making patients "comfortable" using opiates was used as early as 1988.

In a written ministerial statement issued on Thursday, Lamb said that following the report families continued to raise concerns about the care of the relatives and the subsequent investigations into the deaths.

He said that to try to address the concerns he had set up the independent panel to review the documentary evidence held across a range of organisations.

Lamb said: "The events at Gosport War Memorial hospital have caused immense distress to the families of the patients who died. I was deeply concerned by the findings of the Baker report and I am confident that the appointment of Bishop James Jones to chair this independent process will help answer the many questions of the families affected by these shocking events."

Jones said: "I am aware of the heavy responsibility of accepting the invitation to chair the Gosport independent panel. "My first priority will be to consult with the families so that their views are taken into account when framing the terms of reference. My next task will be to assemble a panel and secretariat with the appropriate skills.

"I have already met with some of the families and will ensure that the panel has regular contact throughout its duration.

"I believe the experience of chairing the Hillsborough independent panel will help to equip me in chairing the Gosport panel. Independence and integrity will be the hallmarks of the panel's work."

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