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Expert says drug doses 'reasonable'

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Powerful drug doses prescribed to elderly patients by a doctor have been defended by a world leading cancer expert.

Professor Karol Sikora told a General Medical Council hearing that medical cover was 'inadequate' when GP Jane Barton was clinical assistant at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

So he said prescribing wide dose ranges of painkiller Diamorphine and sedative Midazolam to patients was 'perfectly reasonable'.

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Prof Sikora told the five-strong panel in London yesterday: 'The medical cover was inadequate, therefore the idea that you could call a doctor and get action within a three-to-four-hour time period was unrealistic.

'If the resources aren't there you have to leave a wide range to allow whoever is there to adapt to the circumstance the patient finds themselves in.'

When asked by defence counsel Timothy Langdale QC for his views on the dose ranges of 20mg to 200mg of Diamorphine – a form of heroin – prescribed to patients on Dryad and Daedalus wards by Dr Barton, Prof Sikora said: 'To me, it – 20mg – seems a reasonable starting dose.'

When asked what other options were open to Dr Barton – also a GP at Forton Medical Centre in Whites Place, Gosport – other than pre-prescribing wide dose ranges of drugs to patients, he replied: 'She could live in the place 24 hours a day, that would be one alternative, whereas what she did seems to me perfectly reasonable.'

Dr Barton's conduct is being examined in relation to the care, treatment and subsequent deaths of Geoffrey Packman – known as Mick; Ruby Lake, 84; Robert Wilson, 74; Elsie, Devine, 88; **Code A** 82; Arthur Cunningham, 79 – known as Brian; Enid Spurgeon, 92; Alice Wilkie; Jean Stevens, 73, Eva Page; Elsie Lavender, 83, and Gladys Richards, 91.

All 12 patients died on Dryad and Daedalus wards where Dr Barton was clinical assistant between 1995 and 1999.

Dr Barton has admitted inadequate note-keeping, that dose ranges she prescribed to some patients were too wide, and could have led to them being given excessive doses.

She denies serious professional misconduct.

(Proceeding)

CROWN PROSECUTION SERVICE RULED OUT CHARGES

The General Medical Council hearing into Dr Jane Barton's fitness to practise comes after an inquest jury at Portsmouth Coroner's Court in April heard that the deaths of five patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital were 'more than minimally' contributed to by their medication.

In three cases they found the use of painkillers was inappropriate for their condition or symptoms.

But they also ruled the medication was administered for therapeutic reasons in all five cases and that drugs did not contribute to a further five deaths.

Dr Barton was clinical assistant in charge of the day-to-day running of Dryad and Daedalus wards at the hospital until her resignation in July 2000.

In total, 92 deaths there were subject to three inquiries by Hampshire Police and a probe by the Crown Prosecution Service – which decided in November 2006 no charges would be brought.