

## Families call for fresh police investigation into Gosport hospital 'death ward'

Relatives of five patients who died on a hospital's "death ward" have called for a GP to be reinvestigated after an inquest jury decided excessive doses of morphine contributed to their deaths.



The Gosport War Memorial Hospital in Gosport, Hampshire Photo: PA

By Gordon Rayner and Richard Savill

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Dr Jane Barton, who was the prescribing doctor in each case, was the subject of two lengthy police investigations into a total of 92 deaths which ended with the Crown Prosecution Service deciding there was insufficient evidence to charge her.

But after a 10-year campaign by families of the dead, an inquest in Portsmouth ruled that medication had been a factor in five deaths at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital between 1996 and 1999.

Relatives believed that their loved ones had, in the words of one man, been "intentionally executed" at the hospital's Dryad and Daedalus wards.

The son of one elderly woman who died after being given an increased dose of diamorphine told the inquest that when he asked Dr Barton how long his mother was likely to be in the hospital, she replied: "Do you know your mother has come here to die?"

The inquest jury decided that Robert Wilson, 75, Elsie Devine, 88 and Geoffrey Packman, 67, were given medication which was not appropriate for their condition, and which contributed to

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their deaths, although it had been given for therapeutic reasons. They also ruled that medication had contributed to the deaths of Elsie Lavender, 83, and Arthur Cunningham, 79, but was appropriate for their condition.



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look again at the extensive evidence gathered by police.

Iain Wilson, whose father Robert died after telling his family doctors were "killing" him, said: "I feel absolutely ecstatic, and heartbroken at the same time, that my dad died knowing he was being killed. I will carry on now and make sure these people that are responsible for my father's death are brought to justice."

John White, a solicitor for three of the five families, said: "They feel vindicated by the verdicts and they believe the CPS should look again at the evidence. They don't see this as the end of the story."

Dr Barton is currently being investigated by the General Medical Council, which has imposed interim restrictions on her registration, including banning her from prescribing diamorphine.

The wards were nicknamed the "end of the line" locally because of its allegedly high death rates and suspicions of some families that loved ones who seemed to be in no immediate danger deteriorated rapidly after being admitted and often died within days.

Robert Wilson was admitted to Dryad ward in October 1998 after he suffered a broken arm. He also suffered from liver problems because of a long-standing drink problem and the cause of his death was given as heart and liver failure.

Iain Wilson told the inquest his father had made a good recovery at the Queen Alexandra Hospital in Portsmouth from the fall that broke his arm. But when he was transferred to Gosport, his condition deteriorated severely and he died four days later.

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Mr Wilson said: "I went to give him a cuddle and he spoke his last words to me: 'Help me son, they are killing me.'

"I said 'No they are not Dad, they are trying to do the best for you' and I left him there. When I went in the following day, he was in a coma."

Prof Baker, of the University of Leicester's department of health and science, told the hearing: "The initiation of the diamorphine was inappropriate and the starting dose too high. Mr Wilson might have left the hospital alive if he had not been started on diamorphine."

Dr Barton, who was the main doctor in charge of the two wards, said that many relatives had "unrealistic expectations" for the health of their loved ones as they arrived at GWMH.



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