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Accused Gosport GP waits to hear if she will be struck off

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The doctor accused over elderly patient deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital will have to wait to learn her fate.

Independent legal assessor Duncan Smith yesterday addressed a five-strong Medical Council panel who will now retire to consider whether Jane Barton is guilty of serious professional misconduct.

The panel, which reconvened in public on Tuesday following a 10-week hearing last year, must also decide what action - if any - the GP should face.

Dr Barton, a partner at Forton Medical Centre in Whites Place, Gosport, could be banned from practising if she is found guilty.

The GP denies serious professional misconduct in relation to 12 elderly patients who died at the hospital where she was clinical assistant.

All of the patients were prescribed wide ranging doses of powerful drugs including diamorphine - a form of heroin - and died on Dryad or Daedalus wards between 1996 and 1999.

Addressing the panel at the General Medical Council in Euston Road, London, Mr Smith said: 'To practise safely, doctors must be competent in what they do. They must establish and maintain effective relationships with patients, respect patients' autonomy and act responsibly.

'Doctors have a respected position in society and their work gives them privileged access to patients - some of whom may be very vulnerable.

'A doctor whose conduct has shown that he or she cannot justify the trust placed in him or her should not continue in unrestricted practise while that remains the case.'

He added: 'Should the panel judge Dr Barton to be guilty of serious professional misconduct, it must first determine whether it would be sufficient to take no action following its finding that she has been guilty of serious professional misconduct. This power is regarded as appropriate in only in exceptional cases.'

The panel found Dr Barton guilty of prescribing 'potentially hazardous' and 'inappropriate' drug doses at the end of an earlier hearing in August.

It also found her wide-ranging prescriptions could have led to patients being over-medicated.