

Code A – **Gosport War Memorial Hospital General Medical Council hearing**

Background

A General Medical Council hearing starts today, to establish fitness to practice for Dr Barton for alleged over-prescribing of painkillers at Gosport War Memorial Hospital. The hearing is thought to last for 11 weeks.

This follows 10 inquests held in March to investigate the deaths of 10 elderly patients at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital. The coroner had to ask the Secretary of State (under section 15 of the Coroners Act 1988) for directions to hold inquests of 7 of those who had died because they had been cremated.

In the light of the facts, in February 2008, the SoS decided that it was desirable that inquests should be held and directed the coroner to hold them.

Media Plan

Reactive – the hearing is a matter for General Medical Council.

Press Officer

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Official

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Line To Take

This hearing is a matter for the General Medical Council.

Further lines

* In June 2007 the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Coroner first reported to the Secretary of State (under section 15 of the Coroners Act 1988) the facts about seven deaths which occurred at Gosport War Memorial Hospital over a number of years where the bodies had been cremated.

* In the light of the facts, in February 2008 the Secretary of State decided that it was desirable that inquests should be held into these seven deaths and directed the coroner to hold them.

* The Coroner is an independent judicial officer and MoJ cannot comment on the verdicts of the inquest jury in these cases

* Inquests verdicts cannot determine criminal or civil liability on the part of a named person (rule 42 of the Coroners Rules 1984 Rules).

* It is a matter for Hampshire Constabulary whether they investigate further in the light of the inquest verdicts

* "The legislation relating to section 15 cases will be updated in the Coroners and Justice Bill: the criteria will remain the same but the final decision in a reformed system will be taken by the Chief Coroner."