

Results	
1.	Shipman expert to probe deaths <i>Health Service Journal (HSJ)</i> , September 19, 2002 Thursday, ARTICLE; Archive; News, (443 words)
2.	Sedative errors missed by trust <i>Health Service Journal (HSJ)</i> , July 11, 2002 Thursday, ARTICLE; Archive; News, (510 words), Paul Smith

[Return to List](#)

1 of 2 DOCUMENTS



Health Service Journal (HSJ)

September 19, 2002 Thursday

Shipman expert to probe deaths

SECTION: ARTICLE; Archive; News

LENGTH: 443 words

HIGHLIGHT: Published: 19/09/2002, Volume II2, No. 5823 Page 7

The deaths of 13 elderly patients at **Gosport** War Memorial Hospital are to be investigated by one of the experts involved in the Dr Harold Shipman case.

Chief medical officer Professor Sir Liam Donaldson last week called in Professor Richard Baker, of the clinical governance research and development unit at Leicester University, to carry out a clinical audit at the hospital.

Professor Baker analysed death rates at Shipman's practice in Hyde, Greater Manchester. Dr Shipman is now serving a life sentence for the murder of 15 patients with an inquiry blaming him for 200 more deaths.

The **Gosport** move comes two months after Hampshire police and the Commission for Health Improvement collaborated on an investigation into the use of prescription painkillers at the hospital. It found that between 1997 and 2000, patients at **Gosport** had been regularly over-prescribed painkillers.

The report said: 'Though CHI is unable to determine whether these levels of prescribing contributed to the deaths of any patients, it is clear that had adequate checking mechanisms existed in the trust, this level of prescribing would have been questioned.'

The report found there had been a failure of management at the hospital, including a lack of local prescribing guidelines, no routine review of pharmacy data to pick up over-prescribing, and no supervision and appraisal system to pick up poor prescribing practice.

However, by the time of the report's publication, this had been rectified.

Shipman expert to probe deaths Health Service Journal (HSJ) September 19, 2002 Thursday

A separate police investigation found no evidence that patients had been harmed deliberately but concerns about standards were strong enough to call in CHI.

Sir Liam said: 'Even though both previous investigations found no grounds for serious concern, neither was in a position to establish whether trends and patterns of death were out of line with what would be expected.

'It was the wish to ensure that all necessary investigation was carried out that led to the decision to carry out this further investigation.'

Portsmouth Healthcare trust ceased to exist in April 2002, with management of the hospital taken over by Fareham and **Gosport** primary care trust.

A joint statement from Hampshire and the Isle of Wight health authority and Fareham and **Gosport** PCT welcomed the audit.

'We hope that the outcome will provide definitive answers that relatives, NHS staff and the people of **Gosport** are looking for,' the statement said.

CHI is now working with police in England and Wales to establish how the two can share information. As a direct result of the collaboration on the **Gosport** investigation, talks may lead to a memorandum of understanding covering all English and Welsh police forces.

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[Return to List](#)

2 of 2 DOCUMENTS



July 11, 2002 Thursday

Sedative errors missed by trust

BYLINE: Paul Smith

SECTION: ARTICLE; Archive; News

LENGTH: 510 words

Sedative errors missed by trust Health Service Journal (HSJ) July 11, 2002 Thursday

HIGHLIGHT: Published: 11/07/2002, Volume II2, No.5813 Page 8 9

A Hampshire trust has been condemned after failing to uncover the over-prescription by doctors of powerful pain-killers and sedatives to vulnerable elderly patients.

The Commission for Health Improvement launched an investigation last October into care at **Gosport** War Memorial Hospital - then run by Portsmouth Healthcare trust - between 1998-2001.

The subsequent report, out last week, said the trust had made a catalogue of mistakes which had put patients 'at risk'.

Most importantly, CHI said it had failed to undertake an immediate review of prescribing practice back in 1998 despite a series of police investigations into the deaths of its patients and clues from a pattern of patient complaints, as well as information from pharmacy data. The commission also found there was no system for supervising the performance of GPs working as clinical assistants who had a crucial role in the administration of drugs.

CHI director of nursing Liz Fradd said that because of the inadequacies of assessment on admission, some elderly patients who needed rehabilitation care were given drugs under the 'Wessex guidelines' which were meant to be used for terminally ill patients. Two wards - Daedalus and Dryad - had been worst affected by the 'excessive' use of pain relieving and sedative drugs.

But CHI stressed that it could not determine whether patients died as a result of the hospital's care. CHI chief executive Peter Homa said:

'Portsmouth Healthcare trust failed to have appropriate systems in place in 1998 to monitor the practice of some staff at **Gosport** War Memorial Hospital. It failed to recognise a potential risk to patients, many of whom were frail older people, from the levels of analgesia being prescribed. As a result, it did not carry out a proper review of prescribing and excessive medication wasn't questioned.'

So far an unspecified 'number' of doctors and nurses working at the hospital have been referred to the relevant regulatory bodies - the General Medical Council and the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

But no action has been taken against senior managers responsible for the clinical governance systems in place between 1998-2001.

Ms Fradd stressed that the role of individuals in what happened at **Gosport** were outside the scope of the CHI inquiry but that the executive board were ultimately accountable.

CHI said it had no concerns over standards at the hospital today. In February this year, Hampshire police decided not to continue their investigation into the patient deaths following advice from the Crown Prosecution Service that there were no grounds on which to proceed.

Fareham and **Gosport** primary care trust, which since April took over the running of the hospital, said it fully accepted the report's findings and promised to implement the recommendations in full.

Hampshire and Isle of Wight strategic health authority chief executive Gareth Cruddace said the SHA was not contemplating any further action against individuals or groups of individuals, other than the reviews by professional bodies currently underway.

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