

The Portsmouth Evening News: Inquests in 10 hospital deaths

News, The (Portsmouth, England) (Published as Portsmouth Evening News, The (England)) - May 14, 2008

An inquest has been opened into the deaths of 10 patients at a Hampshire hospital in the late 1990s.

The Portsmouth coroner will look into the deaths of the elderly people, who were all patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

The inquests follow a series of police investigations into the deaths, but no criminal charges have ever been brought.

At the peak of the latest police probe 92 deaths were under investigation. Eventually case files on 10 people, who died between 1996 and 1999, were sent to the Crown Prosecution Service but in December 2006 lawyers there decided there was insufficient evidence to take anyone to court.

The inquests will be into the deaths of Leslie Pittock, Elsie Lavender, Ruby Lake, Robert Wilson, Enid Spurgeon, Elsie Devine, Helena Service, Arthur Cunningham, Sheila Gregory, and Geoffrey Packman.

Complaints from relatives centred on allegations concerning the use of sedatives like diamorphine.

Last year the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire coroner asked for the police files, and opened and adjourned the inquest into the 10 deaths today.

It is expected that the 10 inquests will be held together concurrently, and the hearings, which are likely to take place in Portsmouth and take several weeks, will probably start in the autumn.

The hearings are likely to be conducted by north Hampshire coroner Andrew Bradley, acting as a special Assistant Deputy Coroner for the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Coroner.

• *Index terms: General News; Health & Healthcare; General Medical & Surgical Hospitals; Health Care & Social Assistance; Hospitals; General Medical ; Health Care ; Hospitals*

• *Record: 64243848*

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