

Brian Patterson  
Ministry of Justice  
Coroners Unit  
Steel House  
11 Tothill Street  
London SW1H 9LH

26 November 2007

Dear Brian

**Deaths At Gosport War Memorial Hospital:**

Thank you for your letter. I'm sorry for the delay in replying but as you know, I had surgery on my arm and things took rather longer to mend than anyone had expected.

I can confirm that all of the ten people mentioned in my letter of 15 June 2007 died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital which is within the administrative district of the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Coroner's District. Of those ten, only three have been buried in the District (Sheila Gregory, Elsie Devine and Elsie Lavender), the other seven have been cremated. I interpret this as "destroyed by fire" as stipulated in Section 15 of the Coroners Act 1988.

I had attempted to describe in my earlier letter, and at the meeting we had in August, the reasons why I considered it desirable to hold Inquests into the deaths of the seven cremated people in addition to the three buried ones. In fact, precisely the same reasons would apply and I have enumerated these previously.

To assist you further, I enclose more detailed case summaries relating to each individual death which have been provided to me by the Police for your use. I hope you now have enough information for a Section 15 decision to be made.

As I explained at the meeting, the opening of Inquests into these ten deaths may well give rise to calls to open Inquests from the relatives of the other 82

persons whose deaths were investigated as part of Operation Rochester. None of the 92 deaths investigated by the police were ever reported to the then Coroner at the time of the deaths. All had elements to them suggesting that the circumstances of the deaths might not be entirely natural. It is obviously impossible to estimate how many other Inquests might have to be opened if relatives ask me for Inquests but the police share my concerns in this regard. Up to now, the families concerned have targeted the police with their concerns as they believed that the outcome of the investigations was going to be criminal prosecutions rather than Inquests and I have only had a small amount of contact – so far – with families. I enclose for your information copies of letters I have received so far from family members.

On the point of additional finance being made available by central government to supplement the resources of Hampshire County Council in staging these Inquests, I understand additional funding has been provided to Oxfordshire and Wiltshire County Councils to finance Inquests. Please could you confirm why Hampshire cannot be similarly assisted?

I look forward to hearing from you. Please contact me if you need any further information regarding the Section 15 consent.

Yours sincerely

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