

11 February 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

Gosport War Memorial Hospital

As you may be aware, the long awaited Inquest into ten of the deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital begins on 18th March in Portsmouth. We, at the charity Action against Medical Accidents (AvMA), have been taking an active interest in these matters due to the serious issues raised by events at Gosport and the number of people involved. I am writing to update all the families who have been in contact with us, not just those who are directly involved in this Inquest, on the developments which we are aware of. We are conscious that this will be an emotional time for many of you. If you would prefer not to receive any further communication about this, please let us know.

1 The Inquest

The Inquest starts on Wednesday, 18th March. We understand it should commence at 10 am. The schedule for witnesses is attached. The Inquest will be held at Portsmouth Magistrates Court, The Law Courts, Winston Churchill Avenue, Portsmouth PO1 2DQ. It is open to the public.

2 Legal Representation

AvMA are grateful to Blake Laphorn solicitors, one of the specialist firms of solicitors who are members of AvMA, for agreeing to offer representation to families at this Inquest. Much of the time they are committing to this is on a pro bono basis because of the difficulty in obtaining funding for representation at inquests. We understand that they are instructed by four of the ten families involved in the Inquest.

John White is the solicitor handling the Inquest. He can be contacted at:

Blake Laphorn
New Court
1 Barnes Wallis Road
Fareham
Hants PO15 5UA

Tel: 01489 555293

e-mail:

We are also grateful to Harriet Jerram from Outer Temple Chambers who is the Counsel acting for four of the families. Again, much of her services are on a pro bono basis.

3 Opportunity to Meet

AvMA would be happy to meet with anyone who is particularly interested in the Inquest or other issues related to the deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital. Myself and other colleagues from AvMA will be attending on the first day and will be available from 9 am at the courts. We would also be happy to arrange to meet relatives, whether or not they are included in the Inquest, on the afternoon/evening of Tuesday, 17th March, in Portsmouth. This would provide an opportunity to explain how the Inquest will work, and any other relevant issues. If you would like to meet with AvMA, please contact my PA, Margaret Morley, on 020 8688 9555.

4 General Medical Council

As you may be aware, Dr Jane Barton is due to appear before a Fitness to Practise panel of the GMC but this has been deferred until after the end of the Inquest. If any of you lodged a complaint about Dr Barton and would like AvMA to continue to offer you advice and support through the GMC process, please let us know.

In the meantime, AvMA has written to the GMC asking for an explanation as to why it waited until July 2008 before it placed restrictions on Dr Barton's practice in order to safeguard the public, when it was aware of the same concerns much earlier.

5 Nursing and Midwifery Council

If any of you formally lodged a complaint about any of the nurses involved in the case of your relatives at the hospital, please do get in touch. We are trying to establish exactly how the NMC has dealt with these complaints.

6 The 'Baker Report'

Several families have expressed their disappointment that the report on Gosport, commissioned by the Chief Medical Officer from Professor Richard Baker, has never been published. AvMA has therefore lodged a Freedom of Information request with the Chief Medical Officer for release of the report.

7 The Media

AvMA is aware of keen media interest in the forthcoming Inquest. We will do our best to co-ordinate a responsible briefing of the media. Several families are in direct contact with the media themselves, which is of course only right. However, if any other families would like to make themselves available for interviews, or if you would like to brief AvMA on key points you would like us to put across, please do get in touch.

Yours sincerely

Peter Walsh

Peter Walsh
Chief Executive

