

HEALTH: GMC to examine complaints against former Gosport War Memorial Hospital doctor

Hospital inquiry leads to misconduct charge

by Rebecca Ellinor
Health reporter

A DOCTOR involved in an inquiry into deaths of patients at a Gosport hospital is to be accused of serious professional misconduct.

Dr Jane Barton, who was in day-to-day charge of medical care at Gosport War Memorial Hospital until she left in July 2000, is being investigated by the General Medical Council.

The GMC, which regulates doctors, is looking at the way she performed her duties as a doctor after it received complaints about her.

An investigation by health watchdog the Commission for Health Improvement, which published its report in July, concluded that the use of pain relief at Gosport War Memorial Hospital was excessive and regularly put patients at risk.

Dr Barton was the clinical assistant at the hospital in 1998 when a number of elderly patients - who had gone to the hospital for rehabilitation - died.

However, there is no suggestion Dr Barton or any of the other staff who worked on the wards, who are also being investigated by regulatory bodies, deliberately caused harm to any patient and no criminal charges have been brought against anyone.

Dr Barton performed the role while carrying out other duties as a Gosport family doctor and would have only visited the hospital briefly, seeing patients in between house calls or surgery appointments.

Ian Piper, chief executive

Expert will review rates

THE government's chief medical officer, Sir Liam Donaldson, last week announced he is sending an expert to review death rates at Gosport's War Memorial Hospital.

As reported in *The News* on Saturday, the review will be conducted by Professor Richard Baker, who looked

into the case of Greater Manchester GP Harold Shipman, who was convicted of murder.

Relatives of patients who died following treatment at the hospital have greeted the decision with delight and relief after months of pressing for a further examination of their complaints.

of Gosport Primary Care Trust (PCT) which oversees GPs in the town and runs the War Memorial Hospital, said: 'We're aware the GMC has decided to take Jane Barton's case to the next stage - a professional conduct committee.'

'The PCT and the health authority now need to reflect on that.'

The GMC met to discuss complaints made against Dr Barton at a private meeting earlier this month, after which they decided to refer her case to the conduct committee.

But although the PCT has admitted her case has been referred, the GMC will not confirm it.

A spokeswoman for the GMC said: 'We are aware of her and are currently considering what action, if any, needs to be taken.'

All doctors referred to the committee are charged with serious professional misconduct when they appear at a hearing.

Dr Barton will have been told the basis of the complaint and what allegations have been levelled against her.

However, she will not hear the full details until she appears before the conduct committee.

It is expected it will not be heard until next year because the cases of about 100 other UK doctors are already booked to be heard ahead of hers.

In the meantime, further inquiries may eventually rule out the referral to the conduct committee, which would mean the investigation would cease and allegations would be dropped.

Under new powers, health bosses in Hampshire can suspend Dr Barton if they think it necessary in order to protect members of the public or if they believe it is in the public interest.

However, no action is currently planned.

Dr Barton has not responded to direct inquiries from *The News* made at her home address and the doctor's practice where she works in Crossways in Gosport.

She is off sick from work, as of last week, with a 'condition that pre-dates a hearing by the GMC,' according to Mr Piper.



Dr Jane Barton is to face a charge of serious professional misconduct from the General Medical Council