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The News
COMMENT

Ignorance is emphatically not bliss . . .

It is easy to appreciate the complexity of the task faced by police as they try to unravel the mysteries of 62 suspicious deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

But it is even easier to understand the continuing public concerns.

Police have separated the deaths into three categories – those of serious concern, those needing further analysis and those resulting from natural causes.

And the bereaved families have now been told into which category their individual case falls.

For some of them, at least, that is a big and welcome step forward in the course of an investigation bedevilled by secrecy and delay.

But the continuing refusal to give the public any information about the numbers in each category is difficult to accept.

For one thing the police's decision has no logic. The man on the Gosport omnibus can surely be expected to understand that some things will not turn out as expected in an ongoing investigation.

More importantly, there should in such a case be a presumption in favour of openness. Here we appear to have a presumption in favour of concealment.

The thought process seems to have been to ask 'Why should we hide these figures?' rather than 'Why shouldn't we publish them?'

The result is that no-one can assess the scale of the problem that has existed at the hospital.

If 60 of the deaths remain of serious concern, not only the families but all residents of the hospital's catchment area are entitled to be alerted – even if procedures have since been improved to eliminate mistakes or wrongdoing.

If, on the other hand, 60 of the deaths have been attributed to natural causes, the public is entitled to that reassurance.

Of course the truth almost certainly lies somewhere between the two extremes, but this is a case of ignorance emphatically not being bliss.