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**INQUIRY:** Police close to announcing decisions over deaths at War Memorial

# Relatives to hear hospital outcome

by Nicholas Brooks  
Health reporter

**RELATIVES of 62 people who died at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital are about to hear whether the police feel the deaths could have been suspicious.**

Police are investigating whether the elderly patients were given excessive doses of powerful painkillers by hospital staff.

Solicitor Ann Alexander, who is acting for about half of the relatives in the case, has written to her clients telling them to expect news soon.

They will each be told whether their relatives' deaths are being labelled by police as 'natural causes', 'needing further investigation', or causing 'serious concern'.

The families were told by officers last September that the dead had been split up into these three groups, but were not told which category

## Probe into 62 deaths since 1998

THE latest police probe relates to 62 deaths over a three-year period beginning in 1998.

Officers led by Detective Chief Superintendent Steve Watts, began the current investigation in November 2002 after four previous inquiries petered out.

The new inquiry was sparked by a report by government inspectors who found that patients had been

put at risk by slack controls over prescription drugs.

Officers have now called in nationally-respected medical experts to decide whether any of the deaths appear to be unnecessary.

Families are also waiting to hear the verdict of a Police Complaints Authority probe into one of the previous police investigations, and the result of a study into death rates at the Gosport hospital.

their relative was in. Relatives were not expecting to hear any updates until April, but will now hear the categorisation after they have confirmed to officers whether they want to be told in person or by letter.

Ms Alexander said: 'I have had a meeting with the police, and I have been greatly reassured - the position is that the police are going to notify

the families in the near future as to what their views are in each case.'

Many families are worried that formal statements have still not been taken. Ms Alexander stressed that no final decisions had been reached.

'The views that are being expressed are not final views, but based on the evidence available to them at the time,' she said.

Gillian Mackenzie, whose mother Gladys Richards died at the hospital in August 1998, said: 'I think they are finally getting a move on because of the publicity surrounding the case.'

'It is good news that we are going to be told about our cases, but this is causing stress to people by keeping them hanging on - those people whose cases are "natural causes" should have been told back in September.'

Marjorie Bulbeck, who lost her mother Dulcie Middleton, added: 'It sounds like good news, like we are getting somewhere, but every time we seem to be getting somewhere we go backwards again.'

Detective Inspector Nigel Niven refused to comment on the case.

'We are dealing with a number of family members, and at this moment in time it is a private matter between ourselves and the relatives,' he said.

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### 'Disgusting Dahl' entertains kids

**FAREHAM:** Children will be able to enjoy story and craft activities based on Roald Dahl's popular book *The Twits* this month.

The Disgusting Dahl activities will be run at Fareham Library in Osborn Road from 11am to midday on February 18. The event is for children aged 5 to 10 years. Tickets are available from the library on (01329) 282715.

### Art goes on display

**PORTSMOUTH:** An exhibition of art by asylum seekers in Portsmouth will be held at Friendship House in Elm Grove. The display is the result of an eight-week art workshop supported by the Pallant House Gallery in Chichester.

## READ ON...

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