

■ **WAR MEMORIAL HOSPITAL:** Large doses given as 'matter of course'

Danger drugs 'pre-prescribed' hearing is told

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INVESTIGATION

PRESCRIBING elderly patients large doses of potentially lethal painkillers was 'a matter of course' at Gosport War Memorial Hospital, a panel heard.

Dr Jane Barton's prescribing of drugs including diamorphine – a form of heroin – and sedatives was described as 'inappropriate and on occasion dangerous' at a General Medical Council hearing.

Dr Barton 'pre-prescribed' the drugs, meaning she gave the go-ahead for them to be used within limits she set, and then nurses at the hospital gave them to patients within those limits.

The Gosport GP is alleged to be guilty of serious professional misconduct in relation to the care, treatment and death of 12 elderly patients at the Bury road site.

Allegations include claims

■ GP Jane Barton was the only doctor investigated in relation to the deaths of 92 elderly patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

■ The GP – a partner at Forton Medical Centre in Whites Place, Gosport – was clinical assistant and in charge of the day-to-day running of now defunct Dryad and Daedalus wards at the Bury Road site until her resignation in July 2000.

■ A damning report published by the then Commission for Health Improvement in 2002

found patients were being put at risk.

■ The deaths were subject to three inquiries by Hampshire Police and a probe by the CPS – which decided in November 2006 that no charges would be brought.

■ Dr Barton is already subject to seven conditions placed on her by the GMC including a temporary ban on prescribing painkiller diamorphine. She must also restrict her prescribing of tranquiliser diazepam in line with medical guidance.

starting doses of painkiller diamorphine and sedative midazolam she prescribed were too high, and that she did not keep adequate notes.

Tom Kark, representing the GMC, told the five-strong panel at Regents Place, Euston Road, London: 'In view of the complete lack of notes it has to be inferred that no assessments had been properly presented before opiates were prescribed. The reality in this case is that the pre-

scription of very large doses of opiates appears to have become a matter of course for the patients under Dr Barton's care. Patients were overdosed with opiates so much they they became unresponsive.'

Dr Barton – who was clinical assistant on now defunct Dryad and Daedalus wards at Gosport War Memorial Hospital where the patients died between 1996 and 1999 – has admitted she made mistakes.

She said drug doses she prescribed were too wide and accepted her actions were 'potentially hazardous'.

The hearing – set to last 11 weeks – comes after an inquest jury at Portsmouth Coroner's Court in April heard the deaths of five patients at the hospital were 'more than minimally' contributed to by the medication given.

In three cases they found the use of painkillers inappropriate, but ruled the medication was administered for therapeutic reasons in five cases and that medication did not contribute to a further five deaths.

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