

INQUEST: Court told doses were 'appropriate' to combat patient's pain

Doctor denies killing patients

by **Chris Owen**
Chief reporter

A DOCTOR tells an inquest into 10 deaths at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital that drug doses weren't deliberately increased to kill patients.

Dr Jane Barton's angry denial came at the end of several hours of close questioning by a barrister yesterday.

Patrick Sadd went over the minute detail of Robert Wilson's admission to Dryad ward and his death at the hospital on October 10, 1998.

Mr Sadd, representing Mr Wilson's son Iain, took Dr Barton through the 74-year-old's admission to Queen Alexandra Hospital, Cosham, with a broken shoulder, to his transfer to the War Memorial and his death four days later.

Mr Sadd wanted to know why, when Mr Wilson had been treated with Paracetamol-based drugs at QA, he was suddenly given much stronger painkillers when he arrived at Gosport.

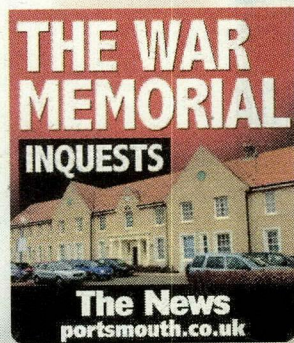
The inquest has already heard how he'd had to endure a four-hour ride in a hospital minibus to get from QA to Gosport.

Dr Barton told the jury considering the cases at Portsmouth Crown Court that she did not remember Mr Wilson's case specifically, but said: 'I'd imagine that after four hours in a hospital minibus he was in a great deal of pain.'

'I would have felt that the level of analgesia he was getting at QA might not have been enough.'

She told the court that when he was admitted to the Gosport hospital she prescribed 20mg of morphine to relieve his pain.

The following day she increased that to 50mg of oral morphine, she told the court.



Mr Sadd reminded Dr Barton that two experts have told the inquests they considered these doses to be 'excessive'.

She told the court: 'I prescribed the appropriate level of morphine for his pain.'

She said she increased the dose on the second day of his time at Gosport because he had reacted well to the drug on his first night.

'The nursing records show he had a settled and comfortable night,' she said.

Mr Wilson, who had severe alcohol problems, died from heart, kidney and liver failure.

But Mr Sadd asked Dr Barton if she had been aware in 1998 of the dangers of giving oral morphine to a patient with a serious liver condition.

'I was aware of the potential danger of using strong opioids on a patient with a diseased liver, but his condition outweighed the risk,' she said.

She then added: 'You are trying to imply that the doses were put up until the patient dies which is absolutely not true.'

(Proceeding)
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Dr Jane Barton walking to the court after a lunch break.

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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

■ The unprecedented inquests into the 10 deaths at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital, between 1996 and 1999, are about to enter their final phase.

■ Today was the 16th day of the hearings in front of a jury of five women and three men. Coroner Andrew Bradley, who normally rules on deaths in north Hampshire, has said he will now take evidence only from written statements.

■ Mr Bradley has told the six barristers representing NHS staff and families of the 10 dead patients that he will hear legal submissions from them next Tuesday and will spend Wednesday and possibly part of next Thursday summing up.

■ At that point he will send out the jury to consider their verdicts - separate ones in each of the 10 cases.