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■ **INQUESTS:** Painkillers worries

Nurse had concerns over drug guidelines

by **Chris Owen**
Chief reporter

A NURSE told an inquest into the deaths of 10 patients that she had previous concerns over the level of painkillers being prescribed at the hospital.

Anita Turbitt said she had raised the issue about the prescribing of drugs, including morphine and diamorphine, in 1991.

That was five years before the first of 10 deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital which are being probed by a coroner and jury at Portsmouth Crown Court.

Mrs Turbitt, a long-serving staff nurse at the Bury Road hospital, said she had raised concerns that an 'analgesic ladder' – which sets out how dosage and types of painkillers should be increased incrementally – was not being adhered to.

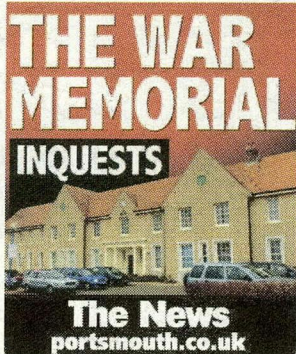
Barrister Tom Leeper, who is representing families of four of the dead, asked Mrs Turbitt: 'Did you at some stage have a concern that at Gosport War Memorial Hospital the guidelines were not being complied with?'

Mrs Turbitt replied: 'Yes. I had concerns in 1991.'

'They were about the amount of training we were given.'

The nurse said that she remembered one particular worry was about the introduction of syringe drivers – the automatic pumps which feed painkillers like diamorphine into a patient's system.

She added: 'We did not get much training then, and syringe drivers were rela-



tively new to us.'

Mrs Turbitt said that as far she remembered she was taught how to attach these to a patient by being given on-the-job training by another nurse.

Mr Leeper said: 'You were concerned in 1991 that no other form of analgesic other than diamorphine was being used.'

'Was one of your concerns that deaths were sometimes hastened unnecessarily?'

Mrs Turbitt added: 'I do not recall stating that myself and I do not recall anybody else raising that.'

She was adamant that by 1996 her worries had been overcome.

'By then I was comfortable with the regime,' she said.

The inquests, which are expected to last six weeks, are being held into the deaths of Arthur Cunningham, 79; Elsie Devine, 88; Sheila Gregory, 91; Ruby Lake, 84; Elsie Lavender, 83; Geoffrey Packman, 67; Leslie Pittock, 82; Helena Service, 99; Enid Spurgin, 92; and Robert Wilson, 75.

(Proceeding)

chris.owen@thenews.co.uk

LOW STAFFING

■ Staff nurse Anita Turbitt had earlier told the inquests there were concerns at Gosport War Memorial Hospital about low staffing numbers.

Giving evidence about the death of 84-year-old Ruby Lake, she confirmed that painkilling drugs had been prescribed for her by Dr Jane Barton, a Gosport GP who also worked on the geriatric wards at the War Memorial.

She confirmed that drugs were administered in accordance with the

rules by two nurses – one who would give the drug and the other who would witness it. This would then be recorded on hospital records.

Mrs Turbitt told the Portsmouth Crown Court jury: 'The only thing I can recall from that time is that we were a community hospital and we possibly did not have so many trained nurses on duty at night, and some drugs being administered may have been witnessed by support staff.'