

MailOnline

Doctor accused over death of 12 elderly patients who were 'over-sedated and left in comas'

By [Daily Mail Reporter](#)

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Inquiry: Dr Jane Barton, pictured at an earlier hearing, is accused of a series of failings in her treatment of 12 patients

Twelve elderly patients died after being over-prescribed painkillers and sedatives by the same doctor, a disciplinary hearing was told yesterday.

Dr Jane Barton prescribed strong opiates in 'excessive' doses, leaving the men and women in 'drug-induced comas', the hearing was told.

Many died within days of coming under her care on two wards at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital, Hampshire, between 1996 and 1999.

Opening the [General Medical Council](#) hearing, Tom Kark, for the GMC, said the elderly patients expected to be rehabilitated and sent home. But the two wards concerned, Dryad and Daedalus, became known as 'the end of the line'.

Many of the patients had never been given opiates before, but Dr Barton wrote prescriptions for drugs, including diamorphine, which allowed nursing staff to increase dosage massively if they saw fit.

Police carried out three separate probes into 92 suspicious deaths at the hospital in the late 1990s, referring ten cases to the

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1191587/Doctor-accused-death-12-elderly-patie...> 23/06/2009

Crown Prosecution Service, but no charges were brought.

Dr Barton, who graduated in medicine from [Oxford University](#) and still works as a GP, took charge of the two wards in 1988.

She would do two hospital rounds during the morning and then attend to her other GP work, leaving nurses with much of her authority.



A jury ruled in April that the drugs prescribed to Robert Wilson (left) and Geoffrey Packham were 'not appropriate' for the conditions they were suffering from

In many cases, as soon as a patient was admitted - even ones previously described as 'well and happy' - she wrote on their notes: 'I'm happy for nurses to confirm death.'

Mr Kark told the hearing: 'Many of the patients you're going to hear about... had not been given opiates as a form of pain relief nor apparently required them. None of the patients were appropriately prescribed opiates by Dr Barton.'

'There was, we say, a series of failures which led to patients being overmedicated and unnecessarily anaesthetised.'

The 12 who died were: Leslie Pittock, 82, Elsie Lavender, 83, Eva Page, 87, Alice Wilkie, 81, Gladys Richards, 91, Ruby Lake, 84, Arthur Cunningham, 79, [Robert Wilson](#), 74, Enid Spurgin, 92, Geoffrey Packman, 68, Elsie Devine, 88, and Jean Stevens, whose age was not given. Mrs Lake was admitted to the Dryad ward on August 18, 1998, after a hip operation and was described as mobile, lucid, well and happy.

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Dr Barton is accused of a series of failings in her treatment of 12 patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital

However Dr Barton prescribed sedatives diamorphine and midazolam, to be administered by an automatic syringe. Three days later Mrs Lake was dead.

Mr Kark said: 'It is likely that this patient died not from illness but as a result of the combined effects of the drugs in her system.'

Barton admits that the dosage prescribed for 11 of the 12 patients was 'potentially hazardous', that for 11 a situation where excessive drugs could be administered had been created, while for ten the dose range was too wide.

She also admits she failed to keep clear, accurate and contemporaneous notes in relation to some or all of her patients.

She denies serious professional misconduct.

The hearing continues.

People:

[Robert Wilson](#)

Organisations:

[Oxford University](#),

[General Medical Council](#)

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I am absolutely outraged at some of the comments here regarding care homes. My late mother was a resident in one and she was given the utmost professional care there was. It is not "nurses" who give the medication to the residents but a Senior Nurse who has many years experience in care home management. Also from my experience they only give morphine to the terminally ill to ease the pain and suffering when the Senior Nurse knows (as well as the family) that the resident is going to pass away. However, I think this particular GP had far too much on her plate. GP's are always on hand and do a weekly

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"round" at nursing homes or if there is an emergency are called to look at the resident concerned. I know of one poor chap who didn't have MRSA/C.Diff when he went to hospital but when he returned to the home he did and subsequently died of this. Don't blame Care Home staff. They do a very good service and are never recognised for this. I should know. I've been through it.

- law-abiding citizen, Bideford, Devon, 09/6/2009 11:52

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I hope I get a doctor like this when I am old and frail. These people who try to prevent painkillers being administered and prefer people to suffer need their head examining.

- a.langley., sitts, kent., 09/6/2009 10:41

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Linda, you should read the sign more carefully it says ' Gosport War Memorial Hospital' not Residential Home. I worked for 10 years as a registered nurse in a nursing home and can only say that the care given was outstanding. The local GP's were totally professional. Staff were not allowed to exceed the stated doses on medication and stringent checks were in place not only by the staff but also by the local pharmacies dispensing the medication. I get sick of people slating the private care sector wherein most do a very good job.

Scenario - a patient is sent into hospital from the home, left lying on a stretcher for over 24hrs, unmoved, suffers awful pressure sores - blames the care home accusing them of neglect. Whereas this is not the case and in this particular incidence proven to be untrue by good record keeping. Yet hospitals can send patients back to homes with horrendous pressure sores, MRSA, C Diff, no action taken against the hospital. Right or not?

- Rif, Crowborough, 09/6/2009 10:35

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Outrageous I say! GP's should not be allowed to look after patients in Nursing Homes. That will immediately prevent all cases of mistreatment of these vulnerable old people. It stands to reason and New Labour need to pull their fingers out and just do it.

- john mitosis, ruchmond, 09/6/2009 09:52

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I suspect that the practice of treating elderly patients this way is more widespread than we are generally aware of both in hospitals and care homes where responsibility is often passed to unqualified and/or incompetent nursing staff. We just do not get to know about it

- Rodney S. Barker, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, 09/6/2009 09:25

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The CPS aren't going to prosecute. No crime has been committed

Why then, are the GMC pursuing this hard-working GP?

- Donna Myerson, Stratford Upon Avon, UK, 09/6/2009 08:54

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