

Hospital doctor 'hastened the death of elderly patient' with painkillers

A hospital doctor hastened the death of an elderly patient by prescribing an excessive dose of painkillers, an expert has told a General Medical Council inquiry.

By Aislinn Simpson

Published: 7:00AM BST 07 Jul 2009

Dr Jane Barton faces being struck off over allegations that she over-medicated a total of 12 patients with cocktails of drugs at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital in Portsmouth in the 1990s.

She was the only doctor to be investigated by three separate police inquiries examining a total of 92 deaths at the hospital. While no criminal charges were ever brought against her, an inquest jury rule in April this year that inappropriate medication contributed to the deaths of three patients.



Dr Jane Barton Photo: PA

Related Articles

One teacher a day in hospital after attack (</education/educationnews/5768709/One-teacher-a-day-in-hospital-after-attack.html>)

Toddler killed by flatscreen TV (</news/uknews/5768479/Toddler-killed-by-flatscreen-television.html>)

Man finds piece of Ford Cortina windscreen in chin 30 years on (</news/newstoppers/howaboutthat/5767976/Man-finds-piece-of-Ford-Cortina-windscreen-in-chin-30-years-on.html>)

Yesterday, an expert's report that was withheld from the inquest jury alleged that Dr Barton's care was not consistent with "good medical practice".

Professor Gary Ford, a geriatric expert and pharmacologist who investigated the deaths of the 12 patients under Dr Barton's care, claimed "overmedication was a frequent, reoccurring problem" on her ward.

Even though the inquest jury ruled that the prescription of painkillers had not contributed to the death of Leslie Pittock, 82, Prof Ford told the GMC he believed he had been given a cocktail of drugs which shortened his life.

Dr Barton prescribed intravenous diamorphine at levels between 80 and 120mg – more than eight times the equivalent dose of oral morphine he was already receiving – along with a high dose of sedative midazolam and antipsychotic drug haloperidol.

"When you increase a dose of opiates there's the risk of developing significant adverse effects – respiratory depression or reduced conscious level," Prof Ford said.

"I can't see how it is consistent with good medical practice. I can't see how it is in the best interests of the patient to have the opiates prescribed."

"This man is dying, there is little doubt about that, but the treatment he is receiving as a dying man should still be appropriate to his need," he added.

Other patients were given six times the amount of recommended diamorphine and lapsed into drug-induced comas, the GMC has heard.

Dr Barton, who is now a partner at Forton Medical Centre in Gosport, faces 15 charges in total relating to her treatment of 12 patients, record keeping and a failure to assess patients properly before prescribing opiates.

She has admitted that the dosage prescribed for 11 of the 12 patients was "potentially hazardous", the dose range was too wide and that this created a situation where excessive drugs could be administered. She has also admitted she failed to keep proper notes in relation to patients.

Barton, of Gosport, Hampshire, denies serious professional misconduct.