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NEWS.

GMC told 'strike off drug doctor'

A doctor who prescribed "potentially hazardous" levels of drugs to elderly patients should be struck off, a General Medical Council panel heard.

Dr Jane Barton is accused of a series of failings in her treatment of 12 patients at Hampshire's Gosport War Memorial Hospital in the late 1990s.

The GMC panel has already made a string of findings against Dr Barton over her treatment of the patients. It is now deciding if she is guilty of serious professional misconduct.

The hearing follows an inquest into 10 patients' deaths which found drugs to be a factor in five cases.

Tom Kark, counsel for the GMC, said many of Dr Barton's failings were "positively harmful" to her patients' welfare.

'Almost no insight'

"The failures demonstrated in this case are so serious that, despite the passage of time, the only sanction that will ensure the protection of the public and public confidence in the profession is one of erasure," he said.

Mr Kark submitted that Dr Barton had demonstrated "almost no insight" into her failings and pointed out that she was warned in 1991 that she needed to change her practice.

He referred to her earlier evidence to the hearing that "with the benefit of hindsight she would not have done anything different".

Mr Kark conceded that there were "serious management failings" at the hospital and that Dr Barton should have received better support and guidance from managers and senior doctors.

Dr Barton, who qualified in 1972, was a clinical assistant on the hospital's Dryad and Daedalus wards at the time of the deaths of the 12 patients.

She admitted a series of allegations about dose levels of painkillers and opiates that could have sedative effects.

Her practice of "anticipatory" prescribing allowed nurses to administer the medication where necessary, the hearing in central London was told.

But the panel found last August that in a number of cases with prescriptions she had written in anticipation of patients needing strong pain relief, the dose range was too wide and lowest doses too high.

Her actions were "inappropriate, potentially hazardous and not in the best interests of the patient", according to the findings.

Timothy Langdale QC, for Dr Barton, argued that she was a "good, experienced and conscientious" doctor and should not be struck off.

He told the panel her working methods were known to all the consultants in the hospital and she "properly" felt she was acting with their approval and sanction.

The 12 patients were: Robert Wilson, 74, Eva Page, 87, Alice Wilkie, 81, Gladys Richards, 91, Leslie Pittock, 82, Elsie Lavender, 83, Ruby Lake, 84, Enid Spurgeon, 92, Geoffrey Packman, 67, Elsie Devine, 88, Arthur Cunningham, 79, and Jean Stevens, 73.

The hearing continues.

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