

Inquest into 10 hospital deaths

An inquest has been opened into the deaths of 10 patients at a Hampshire hospital in the late 1990s.

The deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital between 1996 and 1999 were the subject of a lengthy investigation by Hampshire police.



Brian Cunningham died while being treated at the hospital

In December 2006, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said there was not enough evidence to charge anyone.

Some families claimed patients had died after sedatives like diamorphine were over-prescribed by staff.

Hampshire police conducted two investigations into the deaths, the first of which was the subject of complaints to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

The second investigation, which looked into the deaths of 90 patients, resulted in 10 files being passed to the CPS.

'Insufficient evidence'

But last year the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire coroner asked for the police files, and opened and adjourned the inquest into the 10 deaths on Wednesday.

Brian Cunningham, who was one of the 10 patients, went into the hospital because of bedsores and later died.

His death certificate said he died from bronchial pneumonia, but his family are convinced it was because of an overdose of morphine.

His step-son Charles Farthing said: "It's been in my mind ever since it happened, I can never forget it and there will never be closure until someone is brought to task.

"It's as simple as that, I won't rest on the issue.

"I just hope the coroner will find a correct cause of death and there will be enough evidence from the inquest for the CPS to reopen its case."

It was the death of Gill Mackenzie's 91-year-old mother Gladys Richards that prompted the first police investigation in 1998.

Gill Mackenzie said: "I didn't go to the police because my mother died, I went because I was convinced and I am still convinced that her death broke the law and that's why I went to the police.

"I didn't want it to happen to

anybody else."

In December 2006, Paul Close, of the CPS, said: "I considered whether the evidence gathered by the police showed that a criminal offence had been committed, and particularly the offence of gross negligence manslaughter.



Gill Mackenzie was the first person to go to the police after her mother died

"After looking at all the evidence - including that of experts - and seeking the advice of counsel, I decided there was insufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction.

"Errors alone, no matter how catastrophic the consequences may be, do not, of themselves, amount to gross negligence."

Full inquests, which are likely to take several weeks and be heard in front of a jury later this year, will take place into the deaths of: Leslie Pittock, Elsie Lavender, Ruby Lake, Robert Wilson, Enid Spurgeon, Elsie Devine, Helena Service, Arthur [Brian] Cunningham, Sheila Gregory, Geoffrey Packman.