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INQUEST: Doctor at centre of probe into elderly patients'

GP was

by **Clare Semke**
Health reporter

A DOCTOR at the centre of an inquest into the deaths of 10 elderly patients allegedly told a son: 'Your mother's come here to die.'

Alan Lavender told an inquest yesterday that GP Jane Barton was 'callous and cold' when talking about his mum Elsie.

The 83-year-old died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital after being admitted to the 22-bed Daedalus ward for rehabilitation.

Widow Mrs Lavender suffered a stroke and head injury after falling down stairs at her home in Whitworth Close, Gosport.

However 73-year-old Alan said his mother initially made a good recovery and was transferred to the War Memorial from Royal Hospital Haslar, Gosport. But he said her health 'deteriorated rapidly'.

Mr Lavender, from Whiteley, was the first witness to give evidence at an unprecedented jury inquest into 10 deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

He told the jury: 'Within two or three days of [my mother] being in the War Memorial I had an appointment with Dr Barton.'

'I asked when she would be going home and I said that we needed to know because we had to get rid of the cat if we were going to get her into a warden-controlled flat.'

'Dr Barton replied "you can get rid of the cat".'

'I was stunned that she said that. Dr Barton said "you know your mother's come here to die".'

He added: 'I couldn't believe the callous, cold way that Dr Barton broke this news to me - as if [my mother's] death was pre-determined.'

Two days later he received a phone call from Dr Barton to say his mother had died, the inquest heard.

Stroke and diabetes were registered as the cause of death.

Mr Lavender said: 'I'm concerned that the rapid deterioration of my mother when she initially went to Gosport [War Memorial Hospital] for rehabilitation, and also concerned about the callous way of Dr Barton.'

The inquest, held at Portsmouth Combined Courts, is examining the deaths of 10 patients who were treated on the now defunct Dryad or Daedalus wards and died at the hospital between 1996 and 1999.

Retired nurse Sheelagh Joines worked on Daedalus ward with Dr Barton at the time of Mrs Lavender's admission and subsequent death.

However, when asked by deputy assistant coroner Andrew Bradley if she remembered the 83-year-old, she told the hearing: 'I'm afraid I don't. I really don't. It was 13 years ago.'

But she later told the court Mrs Lavender's name rang a bell when she spotted it on a gravestone at Ann's Hill Cemetery in Ann's Hill Road, Gosport.

She said: 'The only time I knew of Mrs Lavender was when I was walking my dog'



Dr Jane Barton



deaths is accused of being insensitive when dealing with relatives

'callous and cold'



RIGHT FROM TOP:
Robert Wilson, Elsie
Devine and Arthur
Cunningham



Gosport War Memorial Hospital and
deputy assistant coroner Andrew Bradley

AN 11-YEAR QUEST

■ The inquests into 10 deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital marks the culmination of an 11-year quest by grieving families.
■ Gillian Mackenzie kick-started the process after complaining about circumstances surrounding 91-year-old mum Gladys Richards' death there in 1998.

■ Her mother's inquest has not yet been scheduled.
■ For at least six weeks an eight-strong jury will hear evidence before deciding their verdicts.
■ It comes after three Hampshire Constabulary investigations, a Crown Prosecution Service probe and a damning report by the

Commission for Health Inspection – now renamed the Healthcare Commission.
■ It also follows an investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission – formerly the Police Complaints Authority – into the handling of its own investigation.

Pain relief medication

Pain relief medication was sometimes 'pre-prescribed' to elderly patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital, the inquest heard.

Former nurse Sheelagh Joines said nurses were allowed to increase medication on the Daedalus ward without a doctor's approval.

Dr Jane Barton worked as clinical assistant and was in charge of day-to-day medical care there until her departure in July 2000.

She'd given permission for nurses to increase the dosage of analgesics if necessary if she was not there – despite them not being trained to do so.

Mrs Joines told the inquest: 'Patients could

be written up for analgesia before it being given so there was no delay in relieving their pain, but it was never done on a regular basis. I don't think it was done on other wards.'

'Because it was written up we were able to [administer it] but could also get a message to Dr Barton that we were going to increase the dosage. Because it was written on the chart we were well within our rights to give it.'

Asked how she could tell if a patient required extra pain relief she said: 'Because of observing the patient to see if they were in pain, through movement or wanting or stating they were in pain.'

through Gosport and I came across her gravestone.'

Mrs Joines also praised Dr Barton's compassion and openness.

She said: 'In working with Dr Barton I have always found her compassionate, very, very open with patients and patients' relatives.'

'She was a very caring doctor. Her patients' health and welfare – that was all she strove to achieve really, and I have had no objections with working for her.'

'I admire her as a doctor and I have certainly never had any reservations in any treatment she has ordered me

to give over the years.

'And also I have never heard her speak to a patient's relatives as Mr Lavender said she spoke to him.'

'It just wasn't her way, I'm afraid, I'm sorry. She was a professional.'

The inquest is also examining the deaths of Leslie Pittock, 83, Helena Service, 99, Ruby Lake, 84, Arthur Cunningham, 79, Robert Wilson, 74, Enid Spurgeon, 92, Geoffrey Packman, 66, Elsie Devine, 88 and Sheila Gregory, 91.

(Proceeding)

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