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**INQUEST:** 'I find it difficult to criticise without being able to examine any of the patients,' says the expert

# Professor mystified by starting doses

## Woman's broken neck not diagnosed

by Clare Semke  
The News

AN EXPERT has questioned the level of morphine doses given to elderly patients at a hospital, an inquest heard.

Professor David Black was called in by police to investigate the deaths of patients at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

The inquest yesterday heard how 82-year-old Leslie Pittock was given 80mg of Diamorphine through a syringe driver, which automatically pumped the drugs into his body at intervals.

Three days later this was raised to 120mg.

This was despite guidelines recommending a starting dose of 17-20mg, the inquest at Portsmouth heard.

Prof Black told the jury: 'The starting dose of morphine in the syringe driver was more than I would have conventionally expected and I was not able to find a reason for that in the notes.'

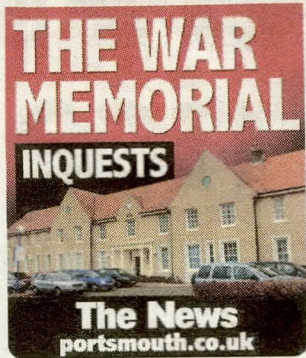
He added: 'It isn't entirely clear what changed for the jump in dose as far as I can tell from the notes.'

Prof Black said Diamorphine was used not only for pain relief but also to alleviate other symptoms in dying patients.

Mr Pittock died in Dryad ward on January 24, 1996.

The inquest into 10 patient deaths at the Bury Road hospital, between 1996 and 1999, also heard how Helena Service was given a higher starting dose of Diamorphine.

The 99-year-old died two



days after being admitted to Dryad ward on June 5, 1997.

She was prescribed a starting dose of 20mg of the drug.

However, Prof Black told the inquest: 'I would have started her on a lower dose, probably five or 10mg in the first 24 hours.'

'There may have been a reason why she was started on 20, I don't know.'

'She was clearly very short of breath and very agitated.'

He added: 'I find it difficult to criticise the 20mg without being in a position to examine her.'

The unprecedented inquest is set to last at least five more weeks.

The court will examine the deaths of Arthur Cunningham, known as Brian, 79, Leslie Pittock, 82, Elsie Devine, 88, Sheila Gregory, 91, Geoffrey Packman, 66, Elsie Lavender, 83, Helena Service, 99, Ruby Lake, 84, Robert Wilson, 74 and Enid Spurgeon, 92.

(Proceeding)  
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Professor David Black outside Portsmouth Crown Court

### FIGHT BY RELATIVES

■ The unprecedented mass inquest into the deaths of 10 elderly patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital marks the culmination of an 11-year fight by relatives.  
■ The process was kick-started by Gillian Mackenzie who launched a complaint following 91-year-old mum Gladys Richards' death there in 1998.

■ The inquest resumed last Wednesday.  
■ It comes after three police investigations, a probe by the Crown Prosecution Service and a damning report by the Commission for Health Improvement - now the Health Care Commission.  
■ The inquest is set to last at least five more weeks.

THE inquest heard that Elsie Lavender was misdiagnosed.

The 83-year-old was transferred to Gosport War Memorial Hospital from nearby Royal Hospital Haslar on February 22, 1996, having reportedly suffered a stroke.

However, Professor David Black, who gave evidence at the inquest into 10 elderly patients' deaths at the hospital, said she had in fact suffered a broken neck.

An X-ray would have revealed the break, he said. However, it was unclear whether one was ever taken.

Mrs Lavender also had a very low platelet count which could have led to a life threatening bleed at any time, the professor said.

However, no investigation was carried out.

On March 5, 1996, she was given 100mg of Diamorphine in a 24-hour period.

She died on Daedalus ward the following day.

Prof Black said: 'I can't explain why that dose was given.'

'That was significantly higher than the conventional dose in the British National Formulary.'

'Equally I can find no evidence documented in the notes that she received any significant side effects from that.'

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