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INQUEST: Jury hears criticism of standard of patient notes recorded by GP

No justification for overdoses – expert

THERE was 'no defence' for giving elderly patients excessive doses of powerful drugs at Gosport's War Memorial Hospital, an expert told an inquest into their deaths.

Doctor Andrew Wilcock told an inquest he could find 'no justification' for the wide range of morphine and sedative doses prescribed to some patients at the hospital.

The expert – asked by Hampshire Constabulary to investigate the deaths of 10 people there – 'disagreed completely' with the pre-prescription of 20mg to 200mg of painkiller diamorphine to some patients.

Dr Wilcock said his own research on 100 elderly deaths showed the medium dose of the drug prescribed to them in the last 24 hours of life was just 40mg.

He also criticised poor note-keeping by GP Jane Barton, then clinical assistant on now defunct Dryad and Daedalus wards where the patients died between 1996 and 1999.

He told the inquests, being held at Portsmouth: 'It doesn't defend what happened here. There is no defence. There is no justification – there is no obvious understanding as to why certain drugs were given in certain doses.'

The inquest earlier heard Dr Barton was too busy to keep accurate patient notes.

Dr Wilcock said: 'People can

by **Clare Semke**
The News

always say they are busy. It doesn't absolve you from doing a good job.

'Part of doing a good job is recording and documentation.'

The expert described the policy of pre-prescribing drugs to dying people as adopted by Dr Barton as 'good practice'.

But, Dr Wilcock said: 'It should always be in the context of small, intermittent doses rather than pre-prescribing with a syringe driver [an automated pump to administer drugs] with a wide dose range.'

He added: 'The doses that are used are not informed. They are not based on what the patient's key needs are.'

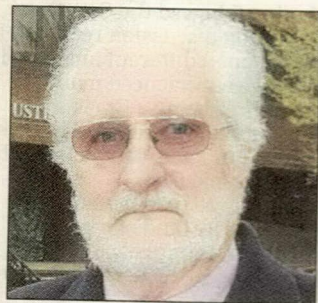
'If you are dealing with more opioids than required its (effects are) then maybe confusion, respiratory depression and death.'

The unprecedented inquest is examining the deaths of 66-year-old Geoffrey Packman – known as Mick, 99-year-old Helena Service, 84-year-old Ruby Lake, 74-year-old Robert Wilson, 88-year-old Elsie Devine, 91-year-old Sheila Gregory, 82-year-old Leslie Pittock, 88-year-old Elsie Lavender, 79-year-old Arthur Cunningham – known as Brian and 92-year-old Enid Spurgeon.

(Proceeding)



Dr Andrew Wilcock, above, criticised poor note-keeping by GP Jane Barton, inset



Capt Carl Jewell

'Drugs contributed to patient's death'

EXCESSIVE amounts of drugs given to an elderly woman at Gosport War Memorial Hospital contributed to her death, an inquest heard.

Expert Dr Andrew Wilcock said the doses of diamorphine prescribed to Enid Spurgeon at Gosport War Memorial Hospital played a part 'more than minimally, negatively or contribu-

latory to her death.'

The 92-year-old died on Dryad ward on April 13, 1999.

When Captain Carl Jewell visited his aunt there the day before she died she was unconscious.

The inquest earlier heard that consultant geriatrician Richard Reid told Captain Jewell Mrs Spurgeon had been

given too much diamorphine but that the dose had been reduced.

Later that evening Captain Jewell received a call to say his aunt had come round. Three hours later at 1.30am hospital staff called again to say Mrs Spurgeon had died from a stroke.

Dr Wilcock added: 'Some of the drugs prescribed were difficult to justify.'

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For more on the Gosport War Memorial inquests see portsmouth.co.uk/gosportinquests