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■ **INQUESTS:** Ex-hospital sister says introduction of painkilling machines sparked concern

Health staff 'fears' over syringe drivers

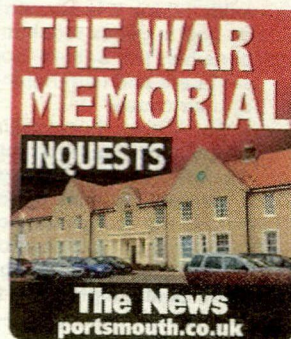
by **Chris Owen**
Chief reporter

A FORMER senior nurse at the Gosport War Memorial told an inquest into 10 patient deaths that staff raised fears about the introduction of new painkilling machines.

Sister Gill Hamblin said colleagues did not like the idea of having to operate syringe drivers.

These are pumps which are attached to a patient's body and automatically pump strong painkillers, such as diamorphine, into the body.

On the 16th day of inquests into the deaths of patients at the Bury Road hospital, a statement made by Mrs Hamblin to police in February 2003 was read to the



jury at Portsmouth Crown Court.

In it she said the syringe drivers were introduced by Gosport GP Dr Jane Barton in 1989, who was responsible for day-to-day medical care of the elderly on the Dryad ward.

'TOO ILL' TO APPEAR

Sister Gill Hamblin, who retired from the War Memorial hospital in 2004, was involved in the care of seven of the 10 patients whose deaths are being examined by the inquests.

Relatives of those who died had wanted to question her about her evidence, but coroner Andrew Bradley explained to the jury she was too ill to appear in court.

He told them: 'Sister Hamblin is a key figure, but she is very ill. She is suffering from cancer, and for me to require her to be here would probably be injurious to her health.'

Mrs Hamblin said staff worries over using the machine were so great that a series of meetings were held with managers.

She added: 'Some time in 1989 she introduced syringe drivers. At this time there were a number of concerns in the use of these.'

'In 1991 concerns were expressed by the night staff about the use of syringe drivers and the lack of training

available for using them.'

She said that meetings were arranged for nurses to voice their worries to senior managers and 'on-the-job' training was arranged.

However, the inquests have been told previously that by 1996, when the first of the 10 deaths happened, staff were content to use the drivers.

In her statement, read by coroner Andrew Bradley,

Mrs Hamblin said she would always query a prescription made by Dr Barton if she thought the dosage was wrong.

She said: 'If I ever had a query with the drugs prescribed by Dr Barton, I would say to her "hang on, is this right?"'

'You would never just give it. You just wouldn't do it.'

(Proceeding)
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