

Families seek inquiry over 'death wards'

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By Gordon Rayner and Richard Savill

RELATIONS of five patients on a hospital's "death wards" have called for a GP to face a new investigation after an inquest jury decided excessive doses of morphine contributed to their deaths.

Dr Jane Barton, who was the prescribing doctor in each case, was the subject of three lengthy police investigations into a total of 92 deaths.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) eventually decided there was insufficient evidence to charge her. But after a 10-year campaign by families of the dead, an inquest in Portsmouth ruled that medication had been a factor in five deaths at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital's between 1996 and 1999.

Relations believed that their loved ones had, in the words of one man, been "intentionally executed" at the hospital's Dryad and Daedalus wards. One man told the inquest that when he asked Dr Barton how long his mother was likely to be in the hospital, she replied: "Do you know your mother has come here to die?"

The inquest jury decided that Robert Wilson, 75, Elsie Devine, 88 and Geoffrey Packman, 67, were given medication that was not appropriate, and which contributed to their deaths, although it had been given for therapeutic reasons. They also ruled that medica-

tion had contributed to the deaths of Elsie Lavender, 83, and Arthur Cunningham, 79, but was appropriate for their condition.

Medication had not been a contributory factor in the deaths of five other patients whose deaths were examined at the inquest.

The inquest jury was not shown a report by Gary Ford, a professor of pharmacology, who raised concerns that there

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may have been a "culture of voluntary euthanasia".

Some of the families believe there has been a cover-up by the NHS and demanded that the CPS look again at the evidence gathered by police.

Iain Wilson, whose father Robert died after claiming doctors were "killing" him, said: "I feel absolutely ecstatic, and heartbroken at the same time, that my dad died knowing he was being killed. I will carry on now and make sure

these people that are responsible for my father's death are brought to justice."

John White, a solicitor for three of the five families, said: "They feel vindicated by the verdicts and they believe the CPS should look again at the evidence. They don't see this as the end of the story."

Dr Barton is being investigated by the General Medical Council, which has imposed interim restrictions on her, including banning her from prescribing diamorphine.

Dr Barton, who was the main doctor in charge of the wards, said many relatives had "unrealistic expectations".

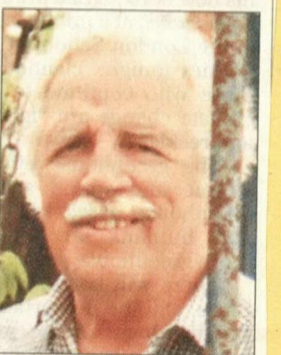
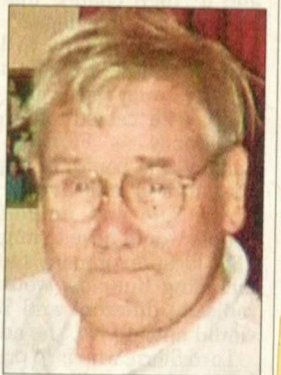
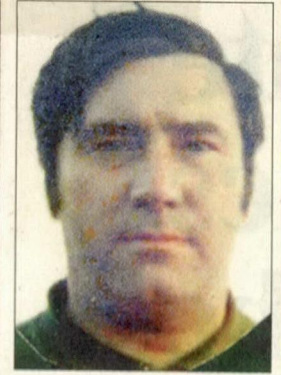
Peter Walsh, chief executive of the charity Action against Medical Accidents, said: "Only an independent public inquiry can get to the bottom of all the relevant issues."

Dr Barton, who still works as a GP, said after the verdicts: "I have always acted with care, concern and compassion towards my patients. I remain very grateful for all the support I have received, from my colleagues and patients alike."

A spokesman for Hampshire Police said there were no plans for a fresh investigation, adding: "It is our genuine hope that the extensive nature of the investigations conducted, the findings of the Crown Prosecution Service and now that of HM Coroner provide those involved with some resolution, if not comfort, for the loss of loved ones."



DANIEL HAMBURY/STELLA PICTURES, SOLENT NEWS & PHOTO AGENCY, PA



An inquest found that Dr Jane Barton, above, prescribed doses of morphine that had contributed to the deaths of five patients. They included, from top to bottom, Geoffrey Packman, Elsie Devine, Robert Wilson and Arthur Cunningham