

HEALTH: Lib Dem health spokesman takes up cudgel on behalf of relatives and coroner

# Inquiry demanded in hospital deaths saga

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A LEADING politician is demanding the government launch a public inquiry into the 92 deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

Lib Dem health spokesman Norman Lamb is the most senior MP to call for a public inquiry into the hospital deaths which happened between 1998 and 2006.

He will this week write to Jack Straw, Secretary of State for Justice, and Alan Johnson, Health Secretary, supporting calls from relatives, the Portsmouth coroner, Hampshire Constabulary and lawyers for an independent government investigation into the deaths.

The move comes just weeks before the General Medical Council is to conduct an

**DAMNING REPORT PUBLISHED**



**Gosport War Memorial Hospital**

- Dr Jane Barton was the only doctor investigated in relation to the deaths of 10 elderly patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.
- A damning report published by the then Commission for Health Improvement in 2002 found patients were being put at risk.
- The deaths were subject to three inquiries by Hampshire Police and a probe by the Crown Prosecution Service – which decided in November 2006 that no charges would be brought.

inquiry into Jane Barton, the doctor at the heart of many of the allegations about the deaths. Several families are threatening to boycott the proceedings in a vote of no confidence after the GMC refused to allow them legal representation.

Mr Lamb, MP for North Norfolk, said: 'This case raises fundamental concerns about the way the GMC oper-

ates and its apparent failure to protect patient safety. While it is absolutely right to follow the principle of innocent until proven guilty, this does not mean steps to protect the public from potential risks cannot be taken, something which has clearly not happened in this case.

'Given that lives were lost in circumstances which cause serious concern, it is

truly extraordinary that this has dragged on for so many years.'

Last month 22 days of inquests were held in Portsmouth into the deaths of 10 elderly patients at the hospital in Bury Road.

In three cases the jury said high doses of strong painkillers given by Dr Barton were inappropriate.

But the jury concluded that

all 10 deaths were from natural causes.

Dr Barton was in day-to-day charge of the now defunct Daedalus and Dryad wards at Gosport War Memorial where the patients died between 1996 and 1999. She is now a partner at the Forton Medical Centre in Whites Place, Gosport.

John White, a solicitor from the law firm Blake Lapthorn, said: 'We are in this for the long haul.'

If the Crown Prosecution Service refuses to re-open the criminal case and the government refuses calls for a public inquiry, then our only option will be to get all the evidence in front of a judge through a group clinical negligence claim. We will get the answers whatever it takes.'

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