

■ **HEARING:** Stepfather was refused relief from drugs, panel told

Man's relative told doctor she was murderer

by **Clare Semke**
Health reporter

A RELATIVE accused a doctor of murdering his stepfather when she refused to stop giving him a powerful cocktail of drugs, a panel heard.

Charles Stewart-Farthing said he had asked Dr Jane Barton to remove a syringe driver – an automatic pump for giving drugs – from 69-year-old Arthur Cunningham, a patient at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

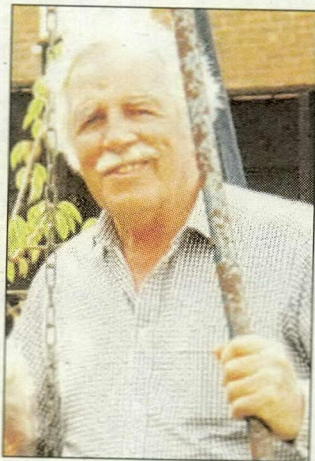
But he told a General Medical Council hearing in London yesterday that Dr Barton had turned down his request.

Mr Stewart-Farthing told the panel: 'She refused bluntly and said she couldn't authorise the removal due to the pain he would experience, at which point I accused her of murdering him and the interview was terminated rather quickly after that.'

Mr Cunningham, from Gosport, who had Parkinson's disease, was pronounced dead at 11.15pm on September 26, 1998 – five days after being admitted to Dryad ward with a bedsore.

Dr Barton – who was clinical assistant at the ward when Mr Cunningham died – admits dose ranges of diamorphine – a form of heroin – and the sedative midazolam she pre-prescribed him were too wide.

The GP also admits the prescriptions could have led to him being given excessive and 'potentially hazardous' amounts of medication.



Arthur Cunningham

And Dr Barton concedes that she did not ask for advice when Mr Cunningham's condition deteriorated.

Mr Stewart-Farthing last saw his stepfather conscious on the day of his admission.

He received a phone call a day later saying medics had administered drugs to 'quieten him down' after he allegedly became aggressive and hurled abuse – including racist comments – at hospital staff.

When he returned following a trip to London the next day Mr Cunningham was unconscious.

Mr Stewart-Farthing said: 'He had gone from being a normal person who could converse to someone who was totally unconscious.'

The General Medical Council panel is also assessing Dr Barton's actions in relation to 11 other patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.



Charles Stewart-Farthing following the inquest

All of them died on now defunct Dryad or Daedalus wards there between 1996 and 1999.

Dr Barton denies serious professional misconduct.

(Proceeding)

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INQUEST JURY FOUND PAINKILLERS INAPPROPRIATE

■ The hearing into the fitness to practise of Dr Barton – who denies serious professional misconduct – is set to last 11 weeks.

It comes after an inquest jury in April said the deaths of five patients at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital were 'more than minimally' contributed to by the medication given.

In three cases they found the use of painkillers was inappropriate for their condition or symptoms.

But they also ruled the medication had been administered for therapeutic reasons in all five cases and that medication had not contributed to a further five deaths.

The GP – a partner at Forton Medical Centre, Whites Place, Gosport – was clinical assistant on the now defunct Dryad and Daedalus wards where the patients died between 1996 and 1999.

Dr Barton could be banned from

practising medicine if found guilty by the General Medical Council.

The panel is examining her conduct in relation to the care, treatment and subsequent deaths of Geoffrey Packman, 66 – known as Mick, Ruby Lake, 84, Robert Wilson, 74, Elsie Devine, 88, Leslie Pittock, 82, Elsie Lavender, 88, Arthur Cunningham, 79 – known as Brian, Enid Spurgeon, 92, Alice Wilkie, Jean Stevens, 73, Eva Page and Gladys Richards, 91.