

Gosport doctor denies putting patients on 'terminal pathway'

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Patients who died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital did so because of existing conditions and not because of the powerful painkillers and sedatives a doctor prescribed for them, a General Medical Council Fitness to Practice Panel was told last week. Dr Jane Barton, who is at the centre of nearly 100 suspicious deaths at the hospital between 1995 and 1999, denied she put patients on a "terminal pathway".

The panel is investigating the deaths of 12 patients at the hospital under her care.

Daedalus and Dryad wards, where Dr Barton worked from 1989-2000, received patients for palliative care and rehabilitation. Dr Barton said that the reality was that most patients were nearing the ends of their lives. She told the panel that her patient Elsie Lavendar, an 83-year-old recovering from a stroke, had a "chance" of recovering when she first arrived on her ward. A day after the patient was started on a prescription of opiates written by Dr Barton, she died. Tom Kark, counsel for the panel, asked the doctor if this prescription had led to her death. Dr Barton said: "Mrs. Lavendar put herself on a terminal pathway when she fell top to bottom down her stairs. I didn't put her on the terminal pathway."

The hearing was told that in each case a patient's death followed shortly after painkillers and tranquilisers were administered. When the Mr Kark suggested this hastened the deaths, Dr Barton said: "It isn't a death warrant. It is not putting you on the death pathway per se, you are on it because you are dying."

The hearing continues.