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# MP comes on side in fight to secure inquiry into deaths

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FAMILIES calling for a public inquiry into the deaths of elderly patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital have secured the backing of a high-profile MP.

Lib Dem shadow health minister Norman Lamb MP has pledged support for relatives of patients who died at the Bury Road site during the 1990s. And he is backing their calls for a full-scale inquiry to be held.

Grieving families want the hearing to get the issues surrounding their loved ones' deaths out into the open.

They are also calling for a criminal prosecution to be brought against Dr Jane Barton, the clinical assistant in charge of the day-to-day running of Dryad and Daedalus wards where the patients died.

They believe large doses of painkillers and sedatives prescribed by the GP led to some patients' deaths.

Mr Lamb said: 'Failures by the police, Crown Prosecution Service, NHS



**INQUIRY** Gosport War Memorial Hospital

and health regulators can be exposed and lessons learnt only if there is an open and transparent inquiry.'

Charles Farthing, whose 79-year-old stepfather Arthur Cunningham, known as Brian, died on Dryad ward in September 1998, said: 'We need some heavyweight political backing to move this forward and we're hoping Mr Lamb can give us this.'

'We want a proper public inquiry and we want the government to release all the facts.'

'We are fighting for justice here and we hope political support will start opening up

doors and finally get all the information on the table.'

Relatives have spent years trying to access reports about hundreds of deaths at the hospital which they feel may hold the key to what happened when Dr Barton worked there.

The families' solicitor John White, of Blake Lapthorn, said: 'Data from the hospital about death rates and their correlation with morphine and sedatives has been blocked. The information between various bodies like the police and CPS has not been shared.'

During an inquest earlier this year the coroner con-



**DOCTOR** Jane Barton

cluded that medication prescribed by Dr Barton contributed to the deaths of five elderly patients.

In August a General Medical Council panel found her guilty of prescribing 'potentially hazardous' doses of powerful painkillers and sedative to patients, after a 10-week hearing.

The five-strong panel decided there was enough evidence to find Dr Barton guilty of 'serious professional misconduct' which could lead to her being banned from practising.

Relatives were set to meet Mr Lamb in London today.