

Doctor says drugs were not used to hasten death

OAP said to be dying when she went back to Gosport hospital

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THE doctor who cared for Gladys Richards said a 'haunted and harrowed' expression on her face showed she was dying.

Dr Jane Barton worked as a clinical assistant at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital (GWMH) in August 1998.

Gladys Richards, 91, was a patient in the Daedalus ward, and under Dr Barton's care.

Yesterday, retired Dr Barton gave evidence at the inquest into Mrs Richards' death, which is being held at the Portsmouth Guildhall.

The court heard painkillers were given to make the pensioner feel comfortable, not to hasten her death.

And it would have been 'inhumane' to take Mrs Richards off diamorphine, to see if she was still suffering from pain, Dr Barton said.

As previously reported, Mrs Richards had surgery on her right hip at the Royal Haslar Hospital, following a fall at the nursing home she was staying at in Lee-on-the-Solent.

On August 11, she was taken to GWMH for rehabilitation.

Dr Barton assessed Mrs Richards and felt she had a '50-50' chance of survival and also noted she was 'happy for nursing staff to confirm death'.

Dr Barton prescribed the use of painkillers oramorph (swallowed) and diamorphine through a syringe driver - a method which continuously administers medication.

Dr Barton said it was an 'administrative decision' as she was not always at the ward and nurses would be able to give the pain relief if needed.

Mrs Richards suffered a second fall in GWMH, and was taken to Haslar for further hip work.

When she was transferred back to GWMH on August 17, Dr Barton saw a change in Mrs Richards.

Dr Barton said: 'There was a marked deterioration, she



GIVING EVIDENCE Dr Jane Barton outside Portsmouth Guildhall

was dying.

'She had a haunted, harrowed expression.

'When she arrived back in the 17th, she was dying. I did not induce her death.'

On August 18, it was decided Mrs Richards would be given diamorphine.

Dr Barton told the court the syringe driver was 'not the act of promoting or hastening death' or the 'instrument of death'.

Mrs Richards died on August 21, and the cause of death was put down to bronchopneumonia.

Between 1996 and 1999, 12 patients died under the care of Dr Barton - including 91-year-old Mrs Richards.

Her daughter Gillian Mackenzie, 79, of Eastbourne, approached police with concerns over her mother's care, which initiated an investigation by Hampshire Constabulary into the deaths.

Inquests of five other patients at the hospital took place in 2009, where a jury ruled drugs prescribed by Dr Barton contributed to the deaths.

A General Medical Council hearing took place in 2010, which found Dr Barton had prescribed 'excessive' drugs to elderly patients, but decided not to remove her from the register.

Mrs Richards' inquest was not included with the other



INQUEST Gladys Richards

five.

Mrs Mackenzie has been campaigning for almost 15 years to have the inquest.

One more witness is due to give evidence this week, before coroner David Horsley announces a verdict.

(Proceeding).