

An inquiry is needed - but it cannot be a witch hunt

HOSPITAL

There will be some who believe that the events at Gosport War Memorial Hospital should now be consigned to history.

After all, we have had police investigations, inquests, and at long last, recently, the publication of the Baker report which was meant to be the final word.

However, the families of those who died in the hospital are not satisfied, and would like, as we report on page 6 today, to see some form of public inquiry, which could take one of three formats.

It may seem that the difference between a full-blown inquiry, an independent investigation and an independent panel is merely semantics, but a public inquiry would be the longest of the options, and the most expensive.

Now, some will say that no expense should be spared, and that money should not be the consideration here, and we would agree with them up to a point. However, while the most important thing is that as detailed a version of the truth is obtained, there is also the need for speed.

The Baker report was an incredibly detailed piece of work, as anyone who has sat down with it will attest. But while it was scientifically rigorous, and presented evidence of the numbers of patients who were given opiates and the death rates - in short, the *what* - its remit was not to consider the *why*. And it is this aspect of the case that still leaves many families baffled, and understandably wanting more information. So we agree an inquiry is needed, but with a couple of provisos. The first is that the wheels start to turn as soon as possible.

The amount of time it took for the truth about the Hillsborough disaster to emerge is a national scandal, and while we would not prejudge this situation and compare the two, we do not want to see more than two decades pass before answers are found.

And secondly, this must not become a witch hunt. This can not be about pursuing Jane Barton, or any other doctors.

But if it leads to a full understanding of what went on in the hospital, and why, in the late 1990s, it will be worth it. We hope to hear some news soon.