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Expert says the use of sedation therapy is cause for concern

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A medical expert fears large drug doses could have intentionally been used to hasten patients' deaths at a hospital.

Professor Gary Ford raised concerns over Dr Jane Barton's pre-prescribing of sedatives, anti-psychotics and Diamorphine – a form of heroin – to elderly patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

He spoke out while giving evidence at a General Medical Council hearing into the GP's fitness to practice as a doctor.

It comes a decade after family members first made allegations that their relatives were over-medicated on the now defunct Dryad and Daedalus wards.

A five-strong panel heard how Dr Barton put patient Code A who was dying, on high doses of Diamorphine and sedative Midazolam. He was later given two different forms of anti-psychotic drugs despite medical guidance advising against it.

The doses of pain killer and sedatives were later increased.

When asked by Tom Kark, QC for the GMC, if the drug doses were likely to produce hazardous or dangerous effects, Prof Ford said: 'First of all it is unlikely that he will remain alert.

'He is going to have a depressed consciousness level and secondarily that will bring about respiratory depression and death at an earlier point.'

He added: 'The use of sedation therapy is an area of potential concern.

'In other countries sedation therapy is open to misuse.

'I'm not saying it was misuse but the problem is they are so powerful in producing respiratory depression.

'It can be ostensibly used to relieve the stress but with the manifest intent of hastening death. I'm not saying that's the intent here, but that's the concern.'

Code A died on January 24, 1996.

Prof Ford said: 'This man was dying.'

'Everybody recognises that. There is little disagreement by experts of that.'

He added: 'But the treatments he is receiving as a dying man should still be appropriate to his needs.'

Dr Barton has admitted dose ranges she prescribed to **Code A** and 11 other patients while she was clinical assistant at Gosport War Memorial Hospital were too wide.

She also admitted that they could have led to potentially hazardous doses being given and said her full note keeping was not in patients best interests.

Dr Barton denies serious professional misconduct.

(Proceeding)

THREE INQUIRIES

Dr Jane Barton was the only GP investigated in relation to elderly patients' deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

Police conducted three inquiries into 92 deaths there.

Complaints were first raised by Gillian Mackenzie whose 91-year-old mum Gladys Richards died at the Bury Road site. The Crown Prosecution Service later decided that no charges would be brought.

Dr Barton was clinical assistant on now-defunct Dryad and Daedalus wards where the patients died.

She is a partner at Forton Medical Centre in White Place, Gosport.