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GOSPORT WAR MEMORIAL HOSPITAL DEATHS

Programme : DRIVETIME
Station : BBC RADIO SOLENT (HAMPSHIRE)
Date : 19/12/06
Time : 1735
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Date : 19/12/06
Time : 1735

TRISTAN PASCOE: Presenter

And in the last few minutes it's been revealed they'll be no criminal prosecutions over the deaths of 10 patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

The decision by the Crown Prosecution Service marks the end of an investigation which has dragged on for years and has been the subject of numerous complaints.

The decision has angered families who say elderly patients were routinely given dangerously high doses of morphine at the hospital, whilst other had to endure shocking standards of care.

In just a moment, we'll speak to Margery Bulbeck, who's mother Delcy [*phonetic spelling*] died after treatment at the hospital. Before that, our Isle of Wight and Portsmouth reporter, Dominic Blake, has more on this. Dom, what was the background first of all for all this?

DOMINIC BLAKE: Reporter

Well, good evening Tristan. Really, concerns about these high dosage of morphine and poor standards of care at the hospital date back as far back as 1991 but nothing was made public at that time, and families say that relatives continued to go into the hospital, in many cases, for simple operations and rehabilitation, only to die unexpectedly. They say their complaints weren't taken seriously when the police investigation finally got underway. They often didn't talk to families and the police eventually found themselves looking at 90 different deaths between 1996 and 1999.

Now, everything dragged on for many many months and then in July, the police finally scaled the investigation down to the strongest 10 cases, the ones that were more serious concern, but today, the Crown Prosecution Service has decided they will be no criminal prosecution against any staff at the hospital.

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TRISTAN PASCOE:

Ninety deaths, the most serious and strong deaths investigated and no prosecution, despite the damning reports about the care that these patients received.

DOMINIC BLAKE:

That's right Tristan. They have been reports over time into what happened there. They focused on two particular wards at the hospital which had previously been used to make people more comfortable when they were very ill, often terminally ill.

Now, a change in policy meant that patients who need rehabilitation and short time to recover from, sometimes minor procedures, were sent to these wards too. But, in some cases, prescriptions for very high doses of morphine were still being written up, in some instances, without a doctor seeing patients even and people who were expected to walk out of the hospital, in many cases, declined rapidly, some died and other, it's clear from these reports, did suffer from appalling standards of care.

TRISTAN PASCOE:

Let's bring in Margery Bulbeck, whose mother Delcy, Delcy Middleton [*phonetic spelling*], died after treatment at the hospital. Her family was one of the very first to alert the authorities to what's happening...or what was happening. Margery, good evening to you.

MARGERY BULBECK: Daughter of Victim

Good evening.

TRISTAN PASCOE:

What's your reaction to the news that there will be no criminal proceedings?

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MARGERY BULBECK:

Well, I'm very disappointed and cannot understand how such a conclusion can be made after all the investigations that have been done, and after that, you know, the detailed poor standard of health and poor standards of care that, you know, I stated my mother received, and the letters that I have had from the Health Authority, etc, who have apologised for the standard of care my mother received, so, therefore, they're admitting that she did not get the best treatment.

TRISTAN PASCOE:

Which, when you consider your mother, Delcy, was one of 90 deaths...

MARGERY BULBECK:

Yes.

TRISTAN PASCOE:

...that have been accepted...

MARGERY BULBECK:

Yes.

TRISTAN PASCOE:

...must make it even harder to accept this decision?

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MARGERY BULBECK:

Yes, because when she was at Haslett [*phonetic spelling*], she had a stroke and she had previously looked after herself...sorry, she had previously looked after herself and, you know, other people, lived on her own, and she had a stroke and went into Haslett [*phonetic spelling*] and had been sent to Gosport War Memorial for recuperation and, you know, she deteriorated very quickly.

TRISTAN PASCOE:

What would you say, Margery, about the way the police have handled this investigation?

MARGERY BULBECK:

Well, also lacked that. I mean, I think it is just a cover up for the police because the first police officer that interviewed me, one of the first things he said to me was "I would be very worried if I had any of my relations in that hospital", and this I have quoted, and that was at the very start of my first complaint.

TRISTAN PASCOE:

Staff may yet face disciplinary action from the GMC, the General Medical Council. Is that gonna be enough for you?

MARGERY BULBECK:

Well, I don't think it's enough, no, because I think definitely a lot of things happened that shouldn't have happened and that is not acceptable. I mean, what these people have got to understand is one day they will be, perhaps, be elderly patients in hospital and I don't think they would like to receive the same treatment.

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TRISTAN PASCOE:

I'm grateful to you for coming on the programme Margery and giving us your reaction. Margery Bulbeck whose mother, Delcy Middleton [*phonetic spelling*], died after receiving treatment at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital. Our Portsmouth and Isle of Wight reporter, Dominic Blake, is still with us. We touched on with Margery there the police investigation. What can be said about these complaints that the police looked into Dom?

DOMINIC BLAKE:

Well, Tristan, the investigation was so slow in getting started that they became almost as many complaints about the police investigation as they were about the treatment at the hospital. At the outset, the police didn't interview families who were concerned about these sudden or unexpected deaths and they seemed to accept assurances from the hospital.

Now, the old Police Complaints Authority investigated the way that the police had run things and so did the new Police Complaints Commission and they upheld many of these findings and, in fact, we actually had three different police investigations and this was the third attempt at getting what these families saw as justice for their relatives. This particular investigation has been going since October 2002 but today's decision really means the end of the road, as far as anybody going to court or any criminal proceedings. So, although we're told that we may see disciplinary proceedings now, the General Medical Council and the NMC haven't been able to take disciplinary action because they were waiting for this decision, we may see that now but I think the message from families today is that that's not just not good enough.

TRISTAN PASCOE:

Dominic, for now, thank you. To the news that we have received within the last 15-20 minutes or so. No criminal prosecutions will take place over the deaths of 10 patients at Gosport War Memorial Hospital. We have just had some contact from the CPS, the Crown Prosecution Service who's given us this statement.

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"Errors alone, no matter how catastrophic the consequences may be, do not of themselves amount to gross negligence. I have written to the families explaining my decision and offering my deepest sympathy. I've offered to meet them to discuss how that decision was reached."

A quote just in from the CPS, Paul Close at the Crown Prosecution Service.

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