

David C. Horsley LLB  
Her Majesty's Coroner  
for Portsmouth and  
South East Hampshire



Coroner's Office  
The Guildhall  
Guildhall Square  
Portsmouth  
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**Code A**

Mr Alex Marshall  
Chief Constable  
Hampshire Constabulary  
West Hill  
Romsey Road  
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**FOR THE PERSONAL ATTENTION OF THE  
CHIEF CONSTABLE**

Hampshire Constabulary

1 - SEP 2009

Chief Constable's Office

28 August 2009

Dear Mr Marshall

**The death of Mrs Gladys Mabel Richards:**

As you will no doubt be aware, at the conclusion of Operation Rochester the case of Mrs Richards was one where the police considered that the circumstances of her death did not merit the forwarding of a file to the CPS.

The Inquests have now been concluded into the deaths of the ten people whose deaths were investigated and referred to the CPS. I have now also opened an Inquest into the death of Mrs Richards because the prima facie evidence concerning her death – that she suffered a fall, breaking her hip which was surgically repaired but that she died in hospital before fully recovering from the effects of the surgery – are such that I would open an Inquest irrespective of whether overdoses of sedatives caused or contributed to her death.

It was not the policy of my predecessor at the time of Mrs Richards' death to open Inquests in such circumstances. Hence the matter was not investigated by the Coroner at the time. However, in fairness to Mrs Richards' relatives, I felt I had to review the then-Coroner's decision in the light of my current practice and open an Inquest in the same way that I would open an Inquest into a death in similar circumstances today. At the present time, my investigations into Mrs Richards' death are at a very early stage and we are still a considerable time away from their conclusion at an Inquest.

I have received a letter dated 24 August 2009 with enclosures (copies are enclosed) from solicitors acting for one of Mrs Richards' daughters bringing to my attention the findings of a General Medical Council Fitness to Practice Panel which sat between 18 June and 23 July 2009 and considered the conduct of a doctor who was primarily responsible for Mrs Richards' care whilst she was in Gosport War Memorial Hospital. The findings of the panel were expressed to have been reached on what is the criminal standard of proof and the solicitors state to me that the evidence now exists to demonstrate, to that standard, that Mrs Richards was unlawfully killed.

If there is now evidence that can show beyond reasonable doubt that Mrs Richards was unlawfully killed, it seems to me that the evidence should be re-assessed and possibly acted upon by the police at the earliest opportunity and without waiting for the outcome of an Inquest. As highlighted by the GMC, a long time has now elapsed since Mrs Richards' death and therefore any potential criminality in relation to it should be reconsidered before people's memories fade even further and witnesses become unavailable.

I have informed the solicitors that I have copied their letter and my reply to it to yourself. I have stressed to the solicitors that it is incumbent upon them to present all the evidence direct to the police without delay.

Yours sincerely

**Code A**

David C Horsley

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