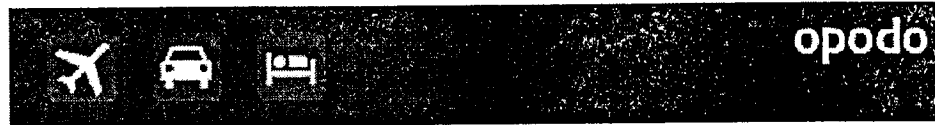


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First published on Monday 30 July 2001:**POLICE PROBE 9 HOSPITAL DEATHS**

A HAMPSHIRE hospital is today at the centre of a police investigation into the deaths of nine patients.

The inquiry comes after complaints from relatives whose loved ones have died at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

It was prompted by suspicions over the death of an elderly woman at the hospital who was prescribed diamorphine, the pain-killing drug.

Other families contacted Hampshire Police after the initial complaint. The fatalities are said to have all taken place over three years.

One complaint has already been investigated and a file sent to the Crown Prosecution Service.

A Hampshire Police spokesman said: "We have been contacted by the relatives of nine people who were concerned about deaths in the hospital. We are speaking to four of those people about their concerns and are making preliminary inquiries."

Ian Piper, operational director of Portsmouth Health Care NHS Trust which runs the hospital, confirmed that the authority was helping police with their investigations.

He said: "I am aware that the police are undertaking preliminary inquiries into a number of cases. Eight people have come forward in addition to the original complainant.

"The trust will assist the police with their preliminary inquiries. We have every confidence in the staff at the hospital and the care they provide."

Gillian Mackenzie, whose 91-year-old mother died at the hospital after being prescribed diamorphine, contacted police in 1998. A dossier on the case has been sent by Hampshire CID to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Solicitors at the CPS have so far recommended that there is insufficient evidence for charges of unlawful killing to be brought, although the case has not been closed by the police.

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