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First published on Tuesday 23 October 2001:

Hospital safety inquiry

by *Siân Davies*

A PROBE has been launched at Gosport War Memorial Hospital by a government health watchdog into patient safety following concerns over the quality of care for elderly patients.

The 24-week investigation by the Commission for Health Improvement was launched after concerns were raised over the level of care older people have received at the hospital.

Concerns have been raised by families of nine people who died at the hospital.

Local organisations and members of the public are being urged to talk to investigators about their experiences of care for older people at the hospital in a bid to determine whether standards at the hospital are being met.

CHI chief executive Peter Homa said: "CHI is undertaking this investigation to look into concerns over the quality and culture of care that patients, who are elderly and particularly vulnerable, have received at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

"The trust, which runs the hospital, is keen to work closely with us to address these concerns and work to improve the quality of care provided."

The investigation will start a week-long visit by inspectors at the hospital in January where they will visit wards and theatres and interview staff and former patients.

Mr Homa said: "The findings of our investigation will result in lessons for the whole of the NHS and this is especially important at a time when community and primary care services are undergoing major change."

The CHI investigation will centre on the administration of drugs at the hospital, transfer arrangements for patients between Gosport War Memorial Hospital and other local hospitals and the clarity of responsibility for patient care.

Today, officials at Portsmouth NHS Trust, who run the hospital, welcomed the investigation.

Chief executive Max Millett said: "We welcome the commission's visit and its review of the service we provide for older people at Gosport War Memorial Hospital."

"We hope the CHI visit will help reassure people about the care provided today and allow us to demonstrate the progress we have made in service provision over the past two or three years."

The latest probe follows an inquiry by detectives into allegations of unlawful killing at the Bury Road hospital.

In April prosecutors examined files concerning the death of 91-year-old Gladys Richards whose daughter Gillian Mac-Kenzie claimed she died as a result of mistreatment at the hospital.

However, prosecutors found insufficient evidence to press charges against the hospital and despite a public meeting with Portsmouth NHS Healthcare chiefs Mrs MacKenzie insisted her mother's death could have been avoided.

Mrs Richards had been admitted to the hospital in August 1998 for rehabilitation following surgery on a damaged hip at neighbouring Royal Haslar Hospital.

Mrs MacKenzie, 67, told the Daily Echo: "I am not satisfied that my mother was treated correctly."

A new investigation was launched in September by Hampshire Police Major Crime Unit into Mrs Richard's death along with claims from eight other families over the death of relatives at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

A report into the findings of the CHI investigation will be published in a year.

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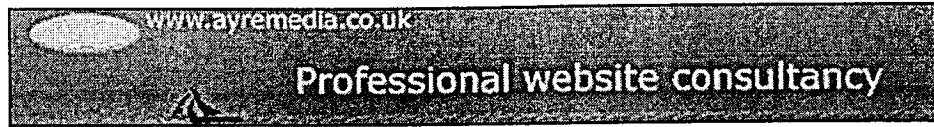
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