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INVESTIGATION INTO GOSPORT WAR MEMORIAL HOSPITAL PUBLISHED

The use of pain relieving and sedative drugs at Gosport War Memorial Hospital in 1998 may have been excessive, according to a report from the Commission for Health Improvement, published today. There was no effective monitoring of the levels of prescription of medicines. Some patients were prescribed strong pain relief on admission, before a total individual assessment of their needs was made. There was also a lack of adequate supervision for individuals working at the trust. CHI is unable to confirm whether any patients died as a direct result but can confirm that patients were regularly put at risk.

Since the incidents in 1998 the hospital has done much work to put policies and guidelines in place to prevent over prescription. CHI has carried out a review of anonymised recent case notes that indicates current prescribing practice at the trust now follows these guidelines and is within national accepted ranges.

Portsmouth Healthcare NHS Trust, which managed Gosport War Memorial Hospital, failed to undertake an immediate review of prescribing practice in 1998, despite a number of triggers. Police investigations, a pattern of patient complaints and pharmacy data should have alerted the trust to a potential problem with the prescription of pain relief.

CHI found no system for supervising the performance of GPs working in the trust as clinical assistants. The trust failed to initiate any review of practice despite concerns about prescribing.

There was confusion among staff at all levels, in the acute trust as well as at Gosport War Memorial Hospital, about the terminology used for the range of care offered to older people. Some patients transferred to the War Memorial Hospital for rehabilitation had much greater healthcare needs than were anticipated. Criteria for admission to the wards at Gosport were not always followed.

The trust now uses specific guidelines to assess and monitor levels of pain and prescribes pain relieving drugs accordingly. CHI found no evidence that blanket prescribing is taking place. The senior management team of Portsmouth Healthcare NHS Trust was well structured, highly motivated and placed a strong emphasis on the welfare and development of trust staff. Performance review systems based around providing good quality patient care had been put

into practice.

CHI has made recommendations for Fareham and Gosport Primary Care Trust and East Hampshire Primary Care Trust, which have managed the hospital and services for older people since 1 April 2002. The recommendations are to ensure that lessons are learnt from this incident by those involved and the wider NHS and include:

- that both primary care trusts and the pharmacy department ensure all relevant staff, including GPs, are trained in the prescription, administration, review and recording of medicines for older people
- that both primary care trusts ensure that learning from complaints both informally on the wards and through the formal NHS complaints mechanism is shared among all wards caring for older people
- that Fareham and Gosport PCT consults with user groups and national patient organisations to determine the best way to improve communication with older patients and their relatives and carers

CHI's chief executive, Peter Homa, said "Portsmouth Healthcare NHS Trust failed to have the appropriate systems in place in 1998 to monitor the practice of some staff at Gosport War Memorial Hospital. It failed to recognise a potential risk to patients, many of who were frail, older people, from the level of analgesia being prescribed. As a result, it did not carry out a proper review of prescribing and excessive medication wasn't questioned.

"The trust has already taken steps to introduce policies and procedures to enhance the quality of patient care. CHI's further recommendations, if implemented, should ensure the continued improvement of care at Gosport War Memorial Hospital."

[ENDS]

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Notes to Editors

- On 1 April 2002 the management of Gosport War Memorial Hospital was passed to Fareham and Gosport Primary Care Trust and management of older people's services to East Hampshire Primary Care Trust. This was part of the restructuring of the NHS in England and Wales.
- CHI is an independent body set up to help the NHS monitor and improve clinical care across England and Wales.
- CHI investigates serious service failure in the NHS when requested by the Secretary of State for Health in England and the National Assembly for Wales, at the request of trusts or other NHS organisations and at the request of other individuals or groups.
- CHI also undertakes routine assessments of every NHS organisation across England and Wales on a rolling programme. It is also responsible for studies that monitor and review the implementation of national service frameworks and National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance.
- The Commission's management structure comprises a board with 13 commissioners and chairman, Dame Deirdre Hine.
- CHI does not cover Scotland as it has its own body, the Clinical

Standards Board for Scotland. The First Minister for Northern Ireland may invite CHI to undertake work at some point in the future.

- The report is available as a free download from the CHI website (www.chi.nhs.uk).
- Hard copies of the report are available from The Stationery Office on 0870 600 5522 at a cost of £6.00.

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