

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



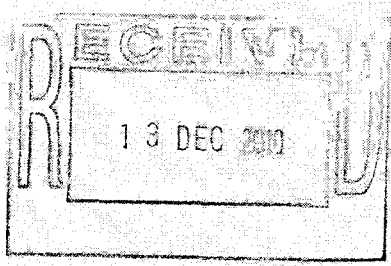
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Coroners & Burials Division
Ministry of Justice
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London SW1H 9AJ

8 December 2010



Dear **Code A**

Gladys Richards, Deceased:

As you will recall, last year Inquests were held into the deaths of ten patients who died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital during the 1990's. These deaths were amongst a larger number of deaths at the hospital in that period which were investigated by the police but where there were no suspicious circumstances in relation to the deaths.

In amongst that larger number was the death of Gladys Richards who died on 21 August 1998. Although the police were unable to detect any criminal activity in relation to Mrs Richards' death, her daughter has long campaigned for an Inquest to be held into it. Mrs Richards' death was reported to my predecessor who decided to dispose of it as a Part A death. However, evidence came before me that the death may not have been due to entirely natural causes and may have stemmed from falls Mrs Richards sustained in the residential home where she lived and subsequently in Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

If similar evidence were presented to me in respect of a current death, I would open an Inquest. Therefore, I decided to open an Inquest into Mrs Richards' death. This I did on 17 March 2009. I then suspended any further preparatory work on the Inquest pending a police review of Mrs Richards' case in the light of the outcome of the ten other Inquests and of GMC disciplinary hearings involving a doctor who had treated Mrs Richards whilst she was in hospital.

The police review was recently completed and I started to assemble the evidence for the Inquest hearing when I realised that Mrs Richards' body had been cremated and that I had opened the Inquest without the consent of the Secretary of State as required by Section 15 of the Coroners Act 1988.

I apologise most sincerely to the Secretary of State for this oversight on my part and would ask that the necessary Section 15 consent can be given so that I can, in fact, open a lawful Inquest into Mrs Richards' death, and not deprive her daughter of the opportunity of a public hearing about the circumstances of the death.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

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