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HOSPITAL: New moves in War Memorial inquiry

Experts to join probe into deaths

DETECTIVES revealed today they will be bringing in drug experts as part of their investigation into the deaths of patients at a Gosport hospital.

After a dramatic turnabout, police have now pledged to speak to the families of elderly people who died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

After a meeting with the families' solicitor, officers in the case said experts in prescribing painkillers would be involved in the inquiry.

Earlier this week, police announced they would interview all the families of the patients who were concerned about the prescription of drugs at the 180-bed hospital. The move came nearly four years after fears were first raised over the deaths. It is thought as many as 57 deaths could be under investigation.

Yesterday, Detective Chief Superintendent Steve Watts, who is heading the investigation, travelled to Altrincham in Manchester, with senior officers, to meet with solicitor Ann Alexander - who successfully called for a public inquiry into the Harold Shipman case.

Det Ch Supt Watts said they discussed how the team of 11 officers would probe the level of care received at the hospital.

**by Sirkka Huish
and Rebecca Ellinor**
The News

'It's going to be a lengthy, very complex investigation as there are a lot of issues. It will be done professionally to make sure we cover everything.'

'I am aware of how the Shipman investigation progressed and what came out of it. It will be incorporated into our investigation. A number of experts in the field of drugs will be consulted in relation to the investigation.'

He did not know how long the investigation would take but said his officers would speak to any relatives who wanted to speak to him.

Ann Alexander said: 'The meeting was very, very productive. It was agreed that we would be bringing in experts - including those in the field of the use of pain-killing drugs - and that the police would interview all those involved.'

'I have absolutely every confidence they will do everything they can to get to the bottom of this.'

Fears about the care were first brought to light when Gillian Mackenzie raised concerns about the death of her elderly mother, Gladys Richards in 1998 and since then 27 families have come forward, raising similar fears. It was revealed on Monday that another 30 people have contacted police.

& GOSPORT **News**



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