

# 'Patient given painkiller to ease her final days'

THE clinical manager at a Hampshire hospital where an elderly patient died nearly 15 years ago told an inquest that she was given medication to help ease her pain in her final days after her condition deteriorated.

Philip Beed, a nurse at Gosport War Memorial Hospital (GWMH), said that when patients such as Gladys Richards were placed on syringe drivers, a device which continuously administers drugs, they were likely to die.

The inquest at Portsmouth has heard that Mrs Richards, 91, was taken to the Hampshire hospital in August 1998 for recuperation following a hip operation.

But after she suffered a haematoma, Mrs Richards, of Lee-on-the-Solent, was given diamorphine administered through a syringe driver and died four days later on August 21, 1998, the hearing was told.

Her daughters, Gillian Mackenzie and Lesley O'Brien, have campaigned for several years for a full inquest to be held into her death.

Mr Beed said that a note made by Dr Jane Barton, the doctor responsible for the ward, on Mrs Richards' file, which stated that she would be happy for nurses to certify death, was standard practice.

He said: "Because we were a community hospital and because we relied on out-of-hours cover, it wasn't uncommon for Dr Barton, with the type of patients we were dealing with, to cover all possibilities.

"With any patient, even if we are planning rehabilitation, their condition may

deteriorate."

The inquest was told that Mrs Richards had a further fall at the GWMH and was taken for a further hip operation before going back to the hospital on August 17.

Mr Beed said her condition had worsened by this stage and that Dr Barton then prescribed for Mrs Richards to be placed on a syringe-driver to relieve her pain.

When asked by coroner David Horsley if this was deemed to be terminal care, Mr Beed agreed and said that this was discussed with her daughters.

He said: "I think that was the feeling at this point, as she was a patient who wasn't getting better, whose symptoms were running out of control."

He added: "We discussed (with the family) that this was the expected outcome of this stage of treatment."

Mr Beed also said that a patient on a syringe driver could die in a short period of time or as long as several weeks.

A previous inquest was held in 2009 into the deaths of ten other patients at the same hospital, all in the late 1990s. The jury found

that medication had contributed to the deaths of five patients and three of these had been given "unsuitable medication".

The General Medical Council has also ruled that Dr Barton, who has since retired, was guilty of multiple instances of professional misconduct relating to 12 patients who died at the hospital.

Hampshire Police previously conducted a criminal investigation into the deaths of 92 elderly patients at the hospital but no prosecutions were brought.

*Proceeding*



Gladys Richards