

GOSPORT: Treatment given 'to relieve pain, not to hasten death'



EVIDENCE: Dr Jane Barton was in charge of the care of Gladys Richards, inset below, when she died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital in 1998.

Doctor 'could tell patient was dying'

A DOCTOR has told an inquest how she could tell that her elderly patient was dying by the "haunted" expression on her face.

Dr Jane Barton was in charge of the care of Gladys Richards, who died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital (GWMH) in August 1998.

She told an inquest how she could tell that the 91-year-old's body "had started to give up" in the days leading up to her death.

When asked by a coroner to explain how she could tell, the doctor said: "It is a sort of haunted, harrowed expression - body language, smell, everything. She was not just frail, she was dying."

As previously reported, the pensioner, from Lee-on-the-Solent was originally sent to the hospital to recover from a hip operation.

She suffered a fall at GWMH and after treatment at Haslar Hospital, she returned and was given the painkiller diamorphine through a syringe driver. She died days later, on August 21.

By Julian Robinson

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Earlier in the inquest, Mrs Richards' family accused the hospital of "condemning" Mrs Richards to death.

But yesterday, Dr Barton said that the treatment she authorised was intended to relieve pain rather than to hasten her death.

She said that the additional surgery and transferral between hospitals may have been factors in reducing her chances of survival.

When being questioned by Lesley O'Brien, the daughter of Mrs Richards, Dr Barton said: "Whether or not she would survive, she still needed proper palliative care to relieve her symptoms."

"It was unlikely that having started on palliative care she would survive, but I did not hasten her death."

Dr Barton told Portsmouth Coroner's Court how it would have been "inhu-

mane" to take Mrs Richards off diamorphine to see if her condition had improved.

A previous inquest, specially authorised by then Justice Secretary Jack Straw, was held in 2009, into the deaths of ten patients at the same hospital, all in the late 1990s.

Jurors found that medication contributed to the deaths of five of the patients and that three of these were 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 carried out a criminal investigation into the deaths of 92 elderly patients at GWMH but no prosecutions were brought.

The inquest continues tomorrow. **Proceeding.**



Daily Echo Yoursay

With the minimum wage set for a below-inflation rise of 12p to £6.31 per hour, we asked readers whether they thought the Government should make sure the minimum wage keeps pace with the cost of living



Clare Stimpson, 61, a teacher from Belmont Road in Portswood, Southampton, said: "It is quite low as it is and I think people work really hard and deserve a good wage."



Colin Andrade, 24, a student from Livingston Road in Portswood, Southampton, said: "I think the minimum wage should be higher. Everything is getting more expensive."



Ian Campbell, 65, a mechanic from Fair Oak, said: "Raising the minimum wage too much could see more people face unemployment because it costs a lot more for employers to keep them."



Roy Woodcock, 53, a bike mechanic from Swift Gardens in Woolston, Southampton, said: "If the Government raise the minimum wage by too much they could price people out of work."