

## 'Drugs ensured mother's death'

The daughter of an elderly woman who died at a heavily criticised hospital in Hampshire nearly 15 years ago has said her mother was "condemned to death" by the medication she was given.

Gladys Richards, 91, was taken to Gosport War Memorial Hospital (GWMH) in Hampshire in August 1998 for recuperation from a hip operation after she had a fall.

But after she suffered a haematoma (bruised blood), Mrs Richards, of Lee-on-the-Solent, Hants, was given diamorphine administered through a syringe driver (a device which continuously administers drugs) and died five days later on August 21, 1998, the hearing was told.

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

During the hearing Mrs Mackenzie questioned whether the medical staff operated a policy of euthanasia.

A previous inquest, specially authorised by then Justice Secretary Jack Straw, was held in 2009 into the deaths of 10 other patients at the same hospital, all in the late 1990s.

The jury 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 (GMC) has also ruled that Dr Jane Barton, who has since retired, was guilty of multiple instances of professional misconduct relating to 12 patients who died at the hospital.

The panel found a catalogue of failings in her treatment of the patients, who later died, including issuing drugs which were "excessive, inappropriate and potentially hazardous".

Failings included inadequate examination of patients, failing to consult colleagues and poor note keeping.

Mrs Mackenzie, 79, from Eastbourne, East Sussex, has continuously campaigned for a full inquest into her mother's death.

Speaking before the hearing, Mrs Mackenzie said: "I am going to have someone to ask the questions I have had for a very long time."

Giving evidence, Mrs Mackenzie described how her mother, who had dementia, was living at Glen Heathers Nursing Home in Lee-on-the-Solent when she suffered a fall.

She had a hip operation at Royal Haslar Hospital in Gosport and was transferred to GWMH for rehabilitative care.

Mrs Mackenzie described how her mother's condition, alertness and general health improved considerably following the operation. But after a further fall she returned to Royal Haslar where the replacement hip was manipulated back into place.

When Mrs Mackenzie visited her mother back at GWMH she found her "moaning" and in "pain".

She was then diagnosed as having a haematoma and Mrs Mackenzie said that medical staff told her she was not well enough to undergo treatment for it.

She said she was told by nurse manager Philip Beed: "I am going to make her life easier by giving her a shot of diamorphine."

Mrs Mackenzie said: "I said 'No you will not. Are you talking about a case of euthanasia, as I will not tolerate euthanasia?'"

Explaining her comments, Mrs Mackenzie said: "If they are giving diamorphine to someone who is nowhere near to death, why else is it? It's Philip Beed who told us she was dying and the kindest thing to do was give her a pain-free death and put her on a syringe driver."

"I said then I would prefer her to go to the Royal Haslar Hospital unless she was so close to death that she would die in the ambulance, and Philip Beed said 'It's possible'. So I was expecting her to die that day and every day I couldn't believe she was still alive."

"She must have had a considerable reserve of strength to survive five days when she had a diet of diamorphine and no hydration whatsoever."

"I believe my mother could have been given treatment at Royal Haslar Hospital where she had twice recently undergone treatment for her hip."

"In my view, a consultant's opinion should have been sought when the haematoma had been discovered."

Published on the  
**10** April 2013  
11:41

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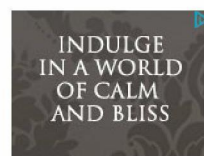
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She added: "I believe a decision was made, for reasons I do not accept, to reject treatment options which would have given my mother a chance to recover, and palliative treatment was commenced and condemned my mother to death.

"It had taken my mother five days to die and I do not think any fit person could have survived a diet of diamorphine and no hydration."

Dr Barton only briefly spoke to her and did not examine her mother in the days before her death, Mrs Mackenzie also said.

She believes that her mother's cause of death was "diamorphine poisoning and dehydration".

Opening the inquest, Portsmouth coroner David Horsley said: "This is an inquest into the death of Mrs Gladys Richards, which I opened some years ago now, and Mrs Richards died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital on August 21, 1998."

Addressing Mrs Richards's daughters, he said: "I am sorry we are here for an inquest into your mother's death. I hope the findings will answer any outstanding questions into your mother's death.

"My verdict cannot be framed in such a way to settle any question of civil liability, or any question of criminal liability of any named person."

Mrs McKenzie's local MP, Liberal Democrat Stephen Lloyd, attended the hearing to provide his support.

He said: "It has been a long haul for Mrs McKenzie and she deserves her day in court. She has fought tenaciously to get to the truth about what happened to her mother. I hope justice will prevail."

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

Mrs Mackenzie said that she considered that Dr Barton had shown "pure negligence" by not examining her mother following the fall and during the days before her death.

She said that she also felt that the cause of death stated on the death certificate of "bronchopneumonia" was not correct as she believed her mother had not shown signs of a chest infection and because it did not refer to the fall or the haematoma.

The inquest, which is set to last nine days, was adjourned until Wednesday.

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