

Family unhappy at verdict on woman's death at Gosport hospital



Gladys Richards pictured at Christmas 1996 aged 90

THE family of a pensioner who died in hospital have criticised a coroner's verdict at the inquest into her death.

Gladys Richards of Lee-on-the-Solent died in Gosport War Memorial Hospital (GWMH) on August 21, 1998, after being taken there to recover from a hip operation at the Royal Hospital, Haslar.

Solicitors acting on her daughter Gillian Mackenzie's behalf had asked coroner David Horsley to return a verdict of unlawful killing based on the alleged gross negligence of the staff at GWMH, who had Mrs Richards under their care at the time.

Mrs Mackenzie claimed that the decision to switch to palliative care, which she says was unnecessary, hastened her mother's death. Mrs Richards was put on a machine to give diamorphine, and her family was told death was imminent.

At the end of the eight-day inquest, Mr Horsley, coroner for Portsmouth and South East Hampshire recorded a narrative verdict.

He said: 'Mrs Richards' death was due to bronchopneumonia.

Mr Horsley said factors contributing 'more than insignificantly' to her death due to bronchopneumonia were:

- n Accidental falls which she sustained at Glen Heathers Nursing Home in Lee-on-the-Solent on the 29th July, 1998 and at Gosport War Memorial Hospital on August 13, 1998.
- n Procedures undertaken at Haslar Hospital, Gosport to treat the injuries she suffered as a result of those falls.
- n Her immobility subsequent to those procedures.
- n Medication administered to her at Gosport War Memorial Hospital for the control of her pain and agitation
- n Her old age, frailty and end-stage dementia.

Mrs Mackenzie, 79, said: 'I find it extraordinary that my mother was in the end stages of dementia.

'When she came around from the initial operation at Haslar, my sister was standing at the end of the bed saying: "Open your eyes mother," and I was sitting by her side stroking her hand.

'My sister asked if she knew who I was, she said "Of course I do, it's Gill".

'If you are in the end stages of dementia, you don't know who anyone is.'

Mrs Richards' other daughter, Lesley O'Brien, who was also at the inquest, said: 'It's a disappointing verdict. We know from the facts that the drugs induced a coma and therefore, in the family's opinion, her death was induced.'

The inquest had been due to finish today, but concluded a day early.

Health chiefs will review verdict and take action

RESPONSIBILITY for Gosport War Memorial Hospital now lies with the Fareham and Gosport Clinical Commissioning Group.

After the inquest, Julia Barton, chief quality control officer of the F&G CCG offered sympathies on behalf of the NHS to Gladys Richards' family.

Ms Barton said they would take 'any necessary action,' following a review of the verdict, but said that lots had changed at the hospital since the late 1990s.

She added that a 2002 investigation found 'adequate policies and guidelines in place governing the prescription and administration of pain-relieving medicines.'

Daughters' fight for truth has taken 15 years

THE death of Gladys Richards at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital in 1998 has sparked a 15-year campaign for justice.

Following her death, daughter Gillian Mackenzie approached police with concerns over her mother's care.

She died under the care of Dr Jane Barton, who was linked to a string of other deaths at the hospital.

This prompted an investigation by Hampshire Constabulary.

After relentless campaigning, the then Home Secretary Jack Straw granted an inquest.

In April 2009, an inquest was held in Portsmouth into the deaths of five patients under the care of Dr Barton.

A jury ruled drugs prescribed by the GP contributed to the deaths of Elsie Devine, 88, Elsie Lavender, 83, Robert Wilson, 74, Brian Cunningham, 79, and Geoffrey Packman, 88.

Following the inquest, the General Medical Council (GMC) held a hearing into Dr Barton's fitness to practise.

She was found guilty of 'multiple instances of serious professional misconduct' relating to 12 patients who died at the hospital, but was not struck off.

Dr Barton decided to retire from Forton Medical Centre in Gosport in early 2010 and a year later applied to GMC to have her name removed from the register, so she could no longer practise as a GP in the UK.

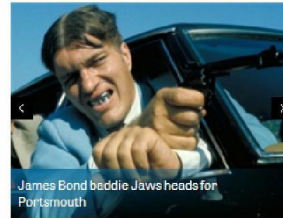
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