

NHS 'starved my husband to death'

Wife sues after he dropped from 11st to 6st in just months because of 'inadequate feeding'



Skeletal: Eric Ward in hospital

PAINFULLY thin at just six stone but still managing to raise half a smile, a skeletal Eric Ward is just a shadow of his former self.

The former rugby player had weighed a healthy 11 stone before he was admitted to hospital.

In just a few months, his weight had plummeted. His heartbroken widow Rosemary has now released this haunting photograph on the left of the page - taken just weeks before his death - as she launches legal action against the NHS.

The 75-year-old claims her husband was left to starve to death in the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff. Staff are accused of effectively giving him half of the 1,964

By Inderdeep Bains

calories he needed every day 'at best'. The father-of-five, 69, became so thin while in their care that his fragile skin could be ripped open by simple sticking plasters, she said.

Mrs Ward, who was married to the retired builder for 53 years, said: 'He went in to that hospital a walking man of a healthy weight and came out a skeleton in a wheelchair.

'When he was discharged it was like bringing a dead body home, he was that frail and was just skin and bones. His legs were so thin.'

Four years after her husband's death in June 2010, Mrs Ward has won a battle to have the case heard and justices at the High Court will hear the allegations later this year.

'I'm not interested in the money - I want answers and justice for my Eric. He was my one and only love and the hospital just left him to starve to death,' she said.

Mr Ward, a grandfather of 37 who also has 25 great-grandchildren, was admitted to the Welsh hospital twice in February 2010 after suffering from severe abdominal pains.

But despite being diagnosed with severe acute pancreatitis, staff are accused of failing to admit him to intensive care or administer adequate feeding. Instead he was discharged just days after each visit, it is claimed.

Following his third and final admission to the hospital in March, Mr Ward discharged himself after two months because there was little hope of survival and the hospital put him on an end-of-life care pathway. He died at his semi-detached home in Cardiff just two weeks later.

Claiming negligence against Cardiff and Vale University Local Health Board, court papers say Mr Ward was 'effectively starving

Fight: Wife Rosemary with a photo of Eric before his weight loss



to death and must have been in considerable pain'.

The hospital 'persisted' in trying to feed him orally even though a scan revealed a gastric obstruction. The papers say he should have been fed intravenously to ensure he got enough

three weeks after his family's repeated pleas for him to be able to go home where he could be cared for by nurses.

Mrs Ward, who slept on the floor by her husband's hospital bed, said: 'In the photo he was smiling because he thought he would be able to come home. Just moments later he broke down as they said no again.'

'It took us three weeks to get him back home where he belonged.'

The case claims that the hospital 'unreasonably refused or failed to act upon the deceased's requests to be discharged'.

Mrs Ward added: 'When he was dying I told him I would fight this to the end, even if I end up losing our house I won't give up.'

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board offered its 'sincere sympathies' to Mr Ward's family but said it could not comment further at this stage.

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sustenance. As a result he received a fraction of the daily protein he needed, the documents add.

Mr Ward's GP and a dietician raised fears over his 'clinically significant 21 per cent body weight loss' over two months.

But he remained in hospital for