

Mid Staffs trust faces charges over deaths of patients

Criminal proceedings linked to scandal-hit hospital are in public interest, says watchdog

By **Laura Donnelly** HEALTH EDITOR

THE trust that ran Stafford Hospital is to face criminal charges related to the deaths of four patients – one as recent as last year.

The Health and Safety Executive

(HSE) has brought the charges against Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, which was at the centre of one of the biggest scandals to hit the health service after hundreds of patients died amid appalling failings in care.

The charges relate to the deaths of Patrick Daly, 89, who died in May 2014; Edith Bourne, 83, who died in July 2013; Ivy Bunn, 90, who died in Nov 2008; and Lillian Tucker, 77, who died in Oct 2005.

Mrs Tucker passed away after a junior doctor gave her a penicillin-based

drug despite being told she was allergic to the antibiotic, an inquest heard. She had suffered a fall that led to a small fracture while on holiday in the area.

The HSE said it had charged the trust after a “thorough and comprehensive investigation into the circumstances of four deaths of patients under its care”.

The trust is due to appear before Stafford magistrates on Nov 4.

Last week police and health officials said that they are investigating claims of an NHS “cover-up” after three-year-old Joanie Meek died last year at

Stafford Hospital. This inquiry will check claims that statements from health workers, who witnessed his death, were falsified.

It is very rare for the HSE to act in cases involving clinical failings, and the body has previously been criticised for its reluctance to prosecute. The Mid Staffs inquiry accused the HSE of “looking for reasons for not taking action rather than starting from a consideration of what is in the public interest”.

Robert Francis, the chairman of the inquiry added: “The more serious and

widespread a failure is, the less likely it is that the HSE will decide to intervene, even where it is apparent that no other regulator is likely to do so.”

Wayne Owen, HSE principal inspector in the West Midlands, said: “We have concluded our investigation and have decided there is sufficient evidence and it is in the public interest to bring criminal proceedings.”

Last year, the same trust was fined £200,000 after Gillian Astbury, 66, died in 2007 because nurses at Stafford Hospital failed to give her the routine

insulin she required. The trust remains in place as a legal entity but no longer provides patient services.

University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust took over last November the running of Stafford Hospital and Royal Stoke University Hospital.

Tim Rideout, the Mid Staffs special administrator, said the remaining “shell organisation” would oversee any “potential criminal liabilities”, adding: “I am committed to bringing matters to a conclusion in the best interests of the families concerned.”