

**Elderly patients in fear of their lives. A morgue piled high with bodies. And a staggering 833 deaths at a Hampshire hospital now being re-examined...**

**Could this be one of the**



Pictures: SOLENT NEWS & PHOTO AGENCY / PA

**Overdose: Elsie Devine died after being given 'enough drugs to lay out a violent six-foot man'**

# biggest NHS scandals ever?

Gosport, Dr Barton is tight-lipped about the scandal that refuses to go away. She declined to comment when I approached her.

Fifteen years ago, her husband told the media that 'instead of trying to find a new Harold Shipman, it might be more constructive to ask why a part-time GP was looking after 48 beds.

'No one has seen any of the letters she sent [to hospital authorities] saying: "You can't keep sending me this number of patients, I cannot cope with this number."

There are, of course, two sides to any story, but this past week the Mail has heard chilling accounts about Gosport Memorial.

In those days, it was run by Portsmouth Healthcare NHS Trust, which was dissolved in 2002 after the disturbing allegations emerged. Eighteen years on, the relatives of Stan Carby are still angry about what happened to him.

They have told Hampshire police that the 65-year-old former naval officer died just 24 hours after being admitted to Daedalus Ward on April 26, 1999, for rehabilitation following a series of mini-strokes.

A large man, his weight ruled him out of being looked after at home.

'Generally, his health was OK,' his daughter Debbie Mackay adds. 'He wasn't in any pain, and was on nothing stronger than aspirin.'

'He was there for rehab, so we hoped they would be able to get him back on his feet. But the

## There was an 'almost routine' use of opiates

following day, they told us he had taken a turn for the worse.'

The family found him lying clammy and unresponsive in his bed. When they lifted him up, they found a tube in his back, later identified as a morphine syringe driver. Hospital staff told the family they were letting 'nature take its course'.

'We knew something wasn't right from the start, and it has been a constant battle for us and other

families to be taken seriously,' says Debbie, now 54 and a secretary.

Enid Spurgeon, 92, was admitted in March 1999 for rehabilitation and, at 88, was described as mobile, lucid, well and happy.

The hospital gave her diamorphine and midazolam, administered by automatic syringe. Three days later, Mrs Lake was dead.

Brian Cunningham, 79, went to the hospital in September 1998. He had an ulcer and bedsores, ailments treated by Dr Barton.

His stepson, Charles Farthing, says: 'On the Monday he was admitted, he was sitting up and asking for chocolates and a box of tissues. When I left the hospital, I had a phone call saying Brian was being difficult and they had to give him something to calm him down.'

'When I went back on the Wednesday, he was comatose. There was a black box with a bleeping noise pumping in drugs.'

At the inquest, a coroner's jury concluded his stepfather had been overdosed. Diamorphine and other powerful painkillers had 'contributed more than minimally' to his death. And so the families' stories — confirmed in documen-

critical of the hospital came out. It was a farce.'

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tation from the numerous hearings, inquiries and investigations over the years — go on. All show a disturbing similarity.

One of the most poignant is that of ex-naval officer Robert Wilson, 74, who was admitted with a broken shoulder. His son, Iain, visited him in the hospital. 'He was in bed and laid very, very still and very, very quiet. I leaned over him

## 'I believe there is a cover-up at the highest level'

and he whispered: "Help me son, they are killing me." I said: "No, they are not, Dad, they are trying to do their best for you."

Next day his father was in a coma, and never recovered. 'I am heart-broken Dad knew he was going to be killed,' Iain told the BBC, before his own early death from a heart attack a few years ago.

For her part, Dr Barton said, after her own GMC hearing, that she did not want patients to be in pain, and always acted in their interests.

'I was faced with an excessive and increasing burden in trying to care for patients at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital. I did the best that I could for them in the circumstances.'

Few of the bereaved are entirely satisfied with that explanation.

This weekend, Ann Reeves said sadly: 'I believe there has been a cover-up at the highest level. This is the biggest scandal ever to hit the NHS. The way my mother Elsie died is no way to end your life.'

With the new report into Gosport Memorial deaths underway, the bereaved families should learn once and for all why their loved ones died — and who exactly should take the blame.