

Another lethal failure

WHO could fail to be shocked by yesterday's revelations about the conduct of Dr Jane Barton, who presided over a regime at Gosport War Memorial Hospital in which elderly patients were given lethal doses of opiates without any clinical justification?

Yet amid the public's anger over her horrifying (and surely criminal?) wrongdoing, it is vital not to lose sight of the systemic scandal unearthed by the former Bishop of Liverpool and his panel.

Any organisation as vast as the NHS is bound to include figures operating under rogue codes of their own. This is why so many institutions exist to protect patients and their loved ones from the abuses of the few.

Yet in this case, finds the report, every single authority – the General Medical Council, the hospital trust, the police, even the local MP – failed catastrophically.

Worse still, they may have covered up what was going on – closing ranks and dismissing complaints from relatives and whistleblowers – while up to 650 were killed or had their lives shortened by inappropriate prescribing of opiates.

If Gosport were an isolated case, it would be appalling enough. But coming after such scandals as Mid-Staffordshire, in which up to 1,200 died of neglect, it suggests an institutional contempt for the elderly.

As the NHS marks its 70th birthday next month, staff and the public will rightly be celebrating a much-loved national institution. But as yesterday's report so graphically underlines, this should also be an occasion for deep soul-searching over the service's attitude to whistleblowers and the value of old people's lives.

Daily Mail 21st June 2018