

Families of Gosport victims prepare private prosecutions

By Patrick Sawyer and Olivia Rudgard

The families of hundreds of patients whose lives were cut short by painkillers prescribed without medical justification are raising money for possible private prosecutions after losing faith in the police.

Relatives of those who died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital say they need to prepare a case against those responsible for one of the biggest scandals in the history of the NHS.

Hampshire Police announced on Thursday it is to hand over its investigations to another constabulary, after a damning report found it failed properly to examine multiple reports by families and whistle-blowers that doctors were giving patients dangerously high levels of opioid drugs. The force was severely criticised by the Gosport Independent Panel, which found more than 650 people died as a result of the prescribing regime at the hospital.

Three investigations by Hampshire police between 1998 and 2010 failed to lead to any prosecutions. The families are preparing for the possibility of private prosecutions of individuals, should any new investigation fail to lead to charges, as well as civil action against the NHS trusts in charge.

Bridget Reeves, 42, whose grandmother Elsie Devine died aged 88 after treatment at the hospital in 1999, told *The Telegraph*: "Police and the NHS failed in their duties and we need a barrister to look at options available to us."

Mrs Reeves, whose GoFundMe page has raised hundreds of pounds towards its target of £500,000, accused Hampshire Police of a fundamental miscarriage of justice. She said: "Police didn't make things public at a time when it might have stopped some people going into that hospital."