

# I did my best, says doctor who oversaw 456 deaths

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The doctor at the heart of the Gosport hospital scandal in which up to 650 patients died has broken her silence to say she was a “hard-working doctor who always did her best”.

Dr Jane Barton, 70, who has been dubbed “Dr Opiate”, appeared in front of her home beside her husband Tim, a retired Royal Navy commodore.

Mr Barton read a statement saying that his wife “has always maintained that she was a hard-working, dedicated doctor, doing the best for her patients in a very inadequately resourced part of the health service”.

Last week, an independent panel report said there had been a “disregard for human life” and a “culture of shortening lives” at Gosport War Memorial Hospital in Hampshire. It concluded that 456 patients had had their lives cut short by inappropriate use of opioid painkillers between 1989 and 2000 and 200 more were likely to have been affected, but records were missing. Dr Barton, who was a clinical assistant at the hospital, was “responsible for the practice of prescribing which prevailed on the wards”, it said. Yesterday, relatives of patients who died said her statement failed to answer questions about

why their loved ones had been given fatal doses, branding her “cowardly” for failing to speak herself.

Dr Barton and her husband are believed to have gone on holiday to Menorca last week, when the report was published.

Mr Barton said his wife “would like to thank her family, friends, colleagues, former patients and the many others for their continued support and loyalty through this protracted inquiry”. He continued: “We ask that our privacy is respected at this difficult time and she will be making no further comments.”

Yesterday Ann Reeves, 72, daughter of Elsie Devine, who died at the hospital in 1999 aged 88, said: “She said exactly what I was expecting her to say and it wasn’t enough. She didn’t even do it herself — she got her husband to do it. She’s been protected for so long. I do think it’s cowardly of her.

I’m sad to hear she was under-resourced, but I would say, ‘Get out or look after your patients properly.’ We want to hear if she can justify the amount of morphine prescribed to patients who weren’t in pain.”

Ms Reeves, who has led families’ calls for justice over the past 20 years,

**Jane Barton’s remarks were branded “cowardly”**

asked Dr Barton for “a face-to-face meeting”. Eric Cousins, 70, whose 82-year-old father Arthur died in the hospital in 2000, told the *Portsmouth News*: “It’s an absolutely shocking reply — spineless and inadequate. That is really saying, ‘I did the best I could but they all had to die.’ I can’t accept that, it is pathetic. It is absolutely disgusting that she could come out with just that, it seems cold and callous.”

Gillian Kimberley, 72, from Sarisbury Green, Hampshire, who was married to Robert Wilson, who died aged 75 in 1998, said: “She’s not got the guts to speak. She’s a rude and arrogant woman. She owes it to the families to explain what happened.”

Dr Barton worked at the hospital between 1988 and 2000. She retired after an investigation by the General Medical Council relating to 12 patient deaths, held in 2010, despite a tribunal finding that she should be allowed to continue working as a GP.

The independent panel report, assessing documents from the GMC investigation, said it had seen “nothing [...] to indicate that she raised concerns about her workload until she was in the process of being investigated”.

The report noted that most witnesses characterised Dr Barton’s dealings with patients’ relatives as “caring and compassionate”. However, some relatives described Dr Barton as “brusque, unfriendly and indifferent”.

