

## UK panel finds lives shortened by hospital's opioid use

June 20 2018, by Danica Kirka

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Ann Reeves, daughter of Elsie Devine who died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital, stands with families of other victims outside Portsmouth Cathedral, south England, Wednesday June 20, 2018, after the disclosure of the Gosport Independent Panel's report. At least 450 people had their lives shortened by a hospital's institutionalized regime of administering opioids without medical justification between 1989 and 2000, an independent panel concluded Wednesday after years of campaigning by family members who demanded answers into the deaths of loved ones. (Dominic Lipinski/PA via AP)

As many as 650 people had their lives shortened by a British hospital's institutionalized practice of administering opioids without medical justification between 1989 and 2000, an independent panel concluded Wednesday after years of pressure from family members who demanded answers about the deaths of their loved ones.

A three-year investigation that examined more than 140,000 records found that 456 lives were shortened by the practice at Gosport War Memorial Hospital in southern England. At least 200 more people were "probably" similarly affected.

"There was a disregard for human life and a culture of shortening the lives of a large number of patients by prescribing and administering 'dangerous doses' of a hazardous combination of medication not clinically indicated or justified," Bishop James Jones, the panel's chairman, said in the report.

Records show that "whereas a large number of patients and their relatives understood that their admission to the hospital was for either rehabilitation or respite care, they were, in effect, put on a terminal care pathway."

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt apologized and said prosecutors would consider whether [criminal charges](#) can be brought.

Jones, the retired bishop of Liverpool, was appointed to head the panel after [family members](#) complained that the hospital failed to respond to concerns about the treatment of their loved ones. The system failed the affected families and blamed them for failings at the hospital, the panel found.



In this March 22, 2009 file photo, Dr Jane Barton arrives at Portsmouth Crown Court, south England. A long-awaited report into a series of suspicious deaths at Gosport War Memorial Hospital, south England, is due to be published, Wednesday June 20, 2018, as the Gosport Independent Panel will present the findings of its investigation. (Chris Ison/PA via AP, File)

Many of the Gosport campaigners are now demanding criminal charges be filed against those responsible. The families gathered near Portsmouth Cathedral after the report was released, clutching photographs of the dead and holding them up for the cameras. They

detailed the many times they had been failed by the system.

Among them was Bridget Reeves, the granddaughter of one of the victims, Elsie Divine. She said it was time for a jury to decide guilt in a criminal court.

"They have grossly failed their ethical standards by abusing people's human rights," she said, recalling "vulnerable relatives who were stripped of their final words to their loved ones, silenced by overdoses."

Jones previously led the public inquiry after charges of official cover-up into the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, in which 96 people were killed in the crush of fans at a soccer game. He saw parallels in the hospital case.



Family members of people who died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital stand outside Portsmouth Cathedral, south England, Wednesday June 20, 2018, after the disclosure of the Gosport Independent Panel's report. At least 450 people had

their lives shortened by a hospital's institutionalized regime of administering opioids without medical justification between 1989 and 2000, an independent panel concluded Wednesday after years of campaigning by family members who demanded answers into the deaths of loved ones. (Dominic Lipinski/PA via AP)

"This report is a vindication of their tenacious refusal to be dismissed," Jones said of the families in the report.

The panel was careful not to assign criminal or civil liability for the deaths. However, it said medical records confirm that over a 12-year period as clinical assistant, Dr. Jane Barton was central to "prescribing any medication required."

In 2010, the General Medical Council ruled that Barton was guilty of multiple instances of professional misconduct relating to 12 patients who died at the hospital. She retired.

The report suggested that British police have focused on the actions of a single individual, rather than looking at the broader picture of what was happening at the hospital.



Family members of people who died at Gosport War Memorial Hospital comfort each other outside Portsmouth Cathedral, south England, Wednesday June 20, 2018, after the disclosure of the Gosport Independent Panel's report. At least 450 people had their lives shortened by a hospital's institutionalized regime of administering opioids without medical justification between 1989 and 2000, an independent panel concluded Wednesday after years of campaigning by family members who demanded answers into the deaths of loved ones. (Dominic Lipinski/PA via AP)

The panel found that the inappropriate use of opioids began in 1989 and steadily increased until 1994. The practice plateaued until 1998 then declined rapidly, with no cases reported in 2001.

Many of the deaths could have been avoided if the hospital had listened to nurses, who first raised concerns.

The Gosport panel found that senior management, health-care

organizations, police, prosecutors, local politicians and medical authorities all failed to protect patients and their relatives, whose interests were "subordinated to the reputation of the hospital and the professions involved."

Police who investigated the deaths treated [family](#) members like troublemakers and gave too much deference to the [hospital](#), the panel found.



Liverpool Bishop James Jones delivers a statement on behalf of an independent panel, outside Portsmouth Cathedral, south England, Wednesday June 20, 2018, after the disclosure of the Gosport Independent Panel's report. At least 450 people had their lives shortened by a hospital's institutionalized regime of administering opioids without medical justification between 1989 and 2000, an independent panel concluded Wednesday. (Dominic Lipinski/PA via AP)

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