

## **Hospital nurse found hanged after she faced being struck off over claims of affair with psychiatric patient**

- **Nurse Elizabeth Watts killed herself days after a misconduct hearing, inquest hears**
- **Patient alleged she had committed a sex act on him while on a hospital trolley, which she denied**
- **The 38-year-old was committed following overdose after details made public**
- **Police have said psychiatric staff failed to follow procedures correctly**

By Daily Mail Reporter

A nurse sacked for having sex with a patient killed herself just four days into a misconduct hearing, an inquest has heard.

Tragic Elizabeth Watts, 38, was found hanged after lurid details about her sexual encounters with a male patient in his 40s were made public.

She was fired from her job after the patient informed hospital officials about their affair, which started after he was admitted to A&E.



Tragic: Nurse Elizabeth Watts was found hanged just hours after being admitted to a specialist psychiatric unit



Scene: North Devon District Hospital where Elizabeth Watts worked as a nurse and was alleged to have started a sexual relationship with a patient

Miss Watts was fired following an internal investigation and both were then called to appear at a Nursing and Midwifery Council tribunal.

During that hearing the patient said that Miss Watts had taken him back to her house for 'rough sex' after he was discharged.

He also claimed that she committed a sex act while he was on a hospital trolley - which she denied.

Miss Watts admitted having sex with him but said nothing had happened until after he had been discharged from hospital.

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The misconduct hearing was then adjourned so Elizabeth could appear and give her evidence - but four days later she was found dead.

The inquest in Plymouth, Devon, today heard how Elizabeth, of Appledore, Devon, took an overdose two days after the hearing but was saved by a friend.

An ambulance was called and she was sectioned under the Mental Health Act and sent to a psychiatric unit.

But she was found hanged in her room at 4am on Friday, January 28 - despite being observed by staff every 15 minutes



Hearing: Miss Watts admitted having sex with the man and swapping e-mails but said nothing untoward took place until after he was discharged.

The inquest in Plymouth, Devon, heard she had become depressed about the case.

A statement by her friend Michael Harries said: 'At the end of February 2009, she told my wife and I that she had been suspended from her job.

'She had no intention of telling anybody what it was about. She didn't tell me any of the details but she did say it was serious.

'She was no more graphic than that. In the two years after the complaint she became more and more depressed.

'She loved nursing and if that was taken away from her she wouldn't know what to do.

'Lizzie had made her mind up that she wanted to take her own life. It was inevitable at some stage she would get her wish.'



Overdose: The inquest heard Miss Watts died two days after being transferred to a psychiatric facility following a suspected overdose

Miss Watts lost her job after the patient came forward and said they'd had sex after he was admitted to the A&E department of the North Devon District Hospital in Barnstaple in February, 2009.

She was later suspended and sacked from the hospital where she had worked since 1998, after qualifying as a nurse in 1985.

On January 24, 2011, the NMC hearing - established to decide if she should be struck off - heard the patient had been rushed to the hospital.

He told the conduct hearing that Miss Watts had 'taken advantage' of him while he was still in hospital.

He said Miss Watts - known as Lizzie to her friends - had stroked him in a 'personal area' on a trolley in the middle of the night.

He then said she offered him a lift to his home when he was released but then took him to her house in Appledore.

He told the misconduct hearing she joined him in the shower before taking him to her bedroom. He said: 'I can't say that she forced me because I could have walked away.'

'She wanted everything to be rough.'

The panel heard they continued meeting over the following two days, exchanged a series of explicit e-mails and text messages.



Service: Miss Watts had worked at the hospital for several years before the allegations were made public

But when their correspondence fizzled out on February 27 he reported the nurse to the North Devon Healthcare NHS Trust.

Miss Watts admitted having sex with him but denied anything happened at the hospital and said their sexual relationship had begun the next evening.

The hearing was adjourned until May 16, 2011, so she could attend in person to take to the witness stand in her defence.

But four days after the patient's evidence was heard on January 28, 2011, police were called to an address in Appledore after receiving reports of someone with a suspected overdose.

Miss Watts was taken to North Devon District Hospital - where she had worked for several years.

She was sectioned under the Mental Health Act and transferred to NHS Plymouth's Glenbourne Unit, a psychiatric facility. She died two days later.

The inquest heard psychiatric unit staff slept on duty and failed to check properly on Elizabeth Watts the night she died.

Sergeant Steve Foale, of Devon & Cornwall Police, told the inquest that staff at the psychiatric unit had not followed procedures correctly.

This included staff sleeping on their breaks, not updating records after a computer malfunction, and not placing Miss Watts in an observational room.

The four-day inquest continues.