

Eljamel scandal: 6 times politicians flip-flopped on public inquiry into disgraced Dundee surgeon

By Justin Bowie :



The Scottish Government is being accused of endlessly dodging a public inquiry into the scandal surrounding former NHS Tayside surgeon Sam Eljamel.

Campaigners who were harmed by the disgraced doctor claim SNP chiefs used a plethora of excuses to avoid action over the past eight years.

Dundee-based Deputy First Minister Shona Robison came under fresh scrutiny for her refusal to grant a full inquiry in 2015 when she was health chief.

Since then, as more patients emerged thus deepening the scandal, the government's reasons for rejecting the demands of fed-up victims of Mr Eljamel have evolved.

This is the full timeline.

Reason #1 – March 2015

Mr Eljamel had been placed under supervision by NHS Tayside nearly two years earlier and was eventually suspended.

It later emerged he had repeatedly botched operations on patients [who were left with life-changing injuries](#).

In 2014, Dundee DJ Pat Kelly – a victim of the rogue neurosurgeon – began what has now been a decade-long push for a public inquiry.



Campaigner Pat Kelly was a victim of Professor Eljamel. Image: Pat Kelly.

But the following March, former health secretary Ms Robison [said there were no plans for a probe](#) since Mr Eljamel was being investigated by the General Medical Council (GMC).

It came after NHS Tayside bosses passed on their own findings to the public body responsible for monitoring the actions of doctors.

Ms Robison said: “Such an investigation can, ultimately, result in certain restrictions being placed on that individual’s freedom to practise or, in some cases, their complete removal from the GMC’s register.

“Given the foregoing, I can confirm that there are no plans for a public inquiry at the present time.”



Shona Robison rejected calls for an inquiry as health chief. Image: PA.

Reason #2- September 2015

Once Mr Eljamel had removed himself from the GMC's register, the Scottish Government [confirmed there were still no plans for an inquiry](#).

A spokesperson said the government was "satisfied" with NHS Tayside's internal probe into the scandal, claiming it had been "thorough and wide-ranging".

Campaigner Mr Kelly said: "If they'd started a public inquiry back then the matter would have been dealt with.

"They were trying their damndest to kick it into the long grass."

Reason #3 – September 2018

It appeared patients might see a breakthrough when then SNP health minister Jeane Freeman [refused to rule out a public inquiry](#).

But it never materialised and instead Ms Freeman eventually launched a separate review into the care patients received.

NHS Tayside bosses were given eight separate recommendations for improving patient care and improving clinical governance once the probe concluded in 2022.

But patients – including Mr Kelly – say they have been given no indication since then that the health board has acted on this.

Reason #4 – November 2022

The scandal was given another public airing as more patients came forward and campaigners rallied outside Holyrood.

But former Deputy First Minister [John Swinney](#) again sidestepped demands for a public inquiry, pointing out NHS Tayside chiefs carried out their own review.

As campaigner demands continued, First Minister Humza Yousaf – at the time SNP health secretary – continued to rule it out.

The following month he said he was “not convinced” a public probe would “provide additional information or bring closure” for patients.

Reason #5 – June 2023

A bombshell twist in the story saw whistleblowers [claim NHS Tayside bosses knew about concerns over Mr Eljamel](#) four years before he was suspended.

Campaigners again ramped up their demands for an inquiry, insisting it was needed to find out what exactly the health board knew.

Mr Yousaf and health chief Michael Matheson said they would consider an independent review into the scandal surrounding Mr Eljamel, but not a full public inquiry.



Humza Yousaf has continued to rule out a public inquiry. Image: Mhairi Edwards/DCThompson

Days later, the SNP leader justified his stance by claiming an inquiry [would struggle to get off the ground since the surgeon has fled Scotland](#).

“The difficulty is of course there would be, I suspect, virtually no cooperation whatsoever from Professor Eljamel, the main individual involved in this,” he said.

“He’s working abroad. There would be no way to compel him to come here. I don’t think it would give the answers that are required.”

Yet campaigners insist Mr Eljamel’s presence is not necessary, since they want the focus of an inquiry to be on NHS Tayside.

Campaigner Mr Kelly said: “There’s no legal requirement for Eljamel to be there. It’s gone further than that now.

“Other people knew. Other people saw what this man was doing.

“The excuses they are using are very poor. They know damn well Eljamel does not have to be there.”

Reason #6 – July 2023

This month Mr Yousaf [expressed concern about how long a public inquiry would take](#) to get answers for patients.

But his remarks were rubbished by rival politicians and campaigners, who pointed out the process could have been launched years ago.



Conservative MSP Liz Smith. Image: Steve MacDougall/DC Thomson.

Tory MSP Liz Smith said: “Shona Robison’s initial excuse for not holding one was due to a GMC investigation – yet when that concluded she still wouldn’t budge.

“Now, nearly a decade on, she and Humza Yousaf have the audacity to oppose a public inquiry on the grounds that it would take too long.

“Those who suffered at the hands of Eljamel will be left feeling that the SNP are determined to avoid holding one at all costs.”

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: “The Scottish Government has committed to establishing an independent commission that could engage directly with former patients and deliver answers quicker than a public inquiry would.

“We will provide more detail on the scope of the commission shortly.”

Responding to cover-up accusations last month, NHS Tayside said: “NHS Tayside were not previously aware of these concerns by former trainees relating to their experiences of Professor Eljamel, who was suspended by NHS Tayside in December 2013.

“We understandably take these concerns very seriously and we would encourage anyone who has concerns about Professor Eljamel to contact the Patient Liaison Response Team.”