

EXCLUSIVE ROGUE BRAIN DOC'S VICTIM TELLS OF TORMENT

BY VIVIANNE AITKEN
Health Editor

VICTIMS of disgraced brain surgeon Sam Eljamel only found out he had operated on them unsupervised when the NHS wrote to apologise.

The surgeon carried out botched operations on dozens of patients on his own when he was meant to be under "clinical supervision" after concerns were raised with NHS Tayside.

He would go on to operate on 111 patients and was said to have "ruined lives". But some lived unaware of the circumstances surrounding operations that caused them pain and misery until the NHS said sorry.

One victim only found out a few weeks ago – 10 years after her brain surgery – that he should have been supervised during her operation.

Caroline Duffin, 48, from Perth, had a shunt put in her head to drain fluid in 2013 but after the op she had to have about 10 separate emergency brain surgeries when the tube blocked up.

She thought she'd been unlucky but now, after she received an apology, she believes her operation was botched.

Caroline, a mum of two daughters now 17 and 22, said: "We didn't know why but during the time I had my initial operation he should have been under supervision."

"NHS Tayside clearly knew that and now I think, 'Why did things go wrong so quickly and so often?' I was led to believe I was just unlucky but now I think maybe not so much.

"Why was he even operating when he should've been under supervision?"

Caroline complained to NHS Tayside years ago, sensing something was amiss with her original operation.

But she said: "I didn't get anywhere. They were very dismissive. After I had the new operation in 2016 I thought, 'I am in good health now so just leave it'."

"The NHS badgered me down for complaining and I thought, 'Where is this getting me? Nowhere, so I let it go."

"The letter I received in August was the first time they even held their hands up and said they were sorry."

"It said, 'You have received this letter because NHS Tayside placed Prof Eljamel under supervision between these dates whilst the Royal College of Surgeons was carrying out an external review into his clinical practice'."

"He was under review and they stated that he operated on me."

"It makes me really angry and upset he was able to operate on me when he was supposed to be under supervision."

"NHS Tayside are as much to blame as him because they allowed it to happen. It makes you have no faith in the NHS whatsoever."

Caroline's ordeal began when she felt a tingling sensation down the right side of her body in 2012 but when it moved into her face she was concerned enough to seek medical advice.

She said: "I initially went to Perth Royal Infirmary and they sent me for scans at Ninewells and that's when they discovered fluid on the brain that wasn't draining."

"Then I was in consultation with Ninewells and Eljamel."

"I was told I could leave it and do nothing but there was always the risk of stroke and being paralysed."

"With the worry of what they said, I thought I'd better do something

Every two or three months I would get a bit confused and then wake up in hospital, head shaved and in a gown

Mum needed about 10 emergency ops after Eljamel surgery

because my children were quite young." Caroline had a shunt put in and said: "I didn't know what the recovery would be after major brain surgery – you expect to have a bit of soreness but it eased off. I had a bit of memory loss."

"But every two or three months I would get a bit confused and then wake up in the hospital being operated on. From what I gather, the shunt would block."

"My husband and my girls would start to see me get a bit confused and my eyes would start to get very big with

all the pressure with the fluid which wasn't draining. It would become quite dangerous for my eyesight but, as it happened more than once, my family knew what to look out for."

"It all happened so quick. I would wake up in hospital, head shaved and in a gown. My daughters would see their mum being taken away. It was not ideal when they were wee."

"With each operation it would take longer for my eyesight to come back and I had the anxiety of wondering if I would go blind and not see my two

girls grow up. In 2013, I was in three or four times then another five or six times until 2016 when I had a different operation. They took the shunt out and drilled a hole in my brain so the fluid all just drained through it."

"It was a riskier operation but, because of the amount of times I had been in hospital, I just couldn't go on like that."

Around the end of 2013 Eljamel disappeared. NHS Tayside sent the letters after a meeting on August 31 which discussed the due diligence

review into him. It admitted he was put under clinical supervision on June 21, 2013, but was not supervised directly in the operating theatre by another neurosurgeon.

Eljamel operated on 111 patients from June to December 2013.

The board admitted: "The indirect nature of the supervision was inadequate when there was a known concern over some aspects of his clinical practice. Therefore the group of 111 patients were potentially exposed to possible harm."



DISGRACED Eljamel, who should have been under supervision

ORDEAL Caroline believes op by Eljamel was botched. Pic: David Johnstone

SURGERY SCANDAL Christopher Reilly and his mum Jean

'Our son's life was wrecked by treatment'

A COUPLE claim a botched op by Eljamel "ruined" their son's life.

They saw him become quiet, withdrawn and unable to work after he went under the knife at the hands of the rogue surgeon.

Jean and Tony Reilly's son Christopher, 41, was diagnosed with hearing problems when he was 20 but an MRI showed he had hydrocephalus – excess fluid on the brain.

Christopher, from Cupar, in Fife, worked in a second-hand furniture place and was on his feet five days a week.

Jean, 67, said: "He doesn't have learning difficulties but with the hydrocephalus his reflexes are a bit slower."

"But he was having to speak to people at his job and was happy to do that. He didn't go out much but he went to the football with his dad and the local pub."

"His dad and I noticed when he was walking up from the bus that he wasn't walking properly. He was shuffling his feet and was leaning forward."

"I took him to the doctor and he was referred to Ninewells in 2013."

Prof Eljamel said he had bulging discs in his spine.

Jean said: "Eljamel said he would remove the bulging discs and replace them with something."

"He said there would be a small incision in his neck at the front but when we went to see him after his operation his neck was slashed from ear to ear."

While the couple were concerned, they did not pursue it at the time.

But a year later they were more worried when Christopher developed a deep vein thrombosis which they believe may have happened as a result of the operation. Jean said:

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"I just noticed his leg was three times as big as the other one. The hospital was bamboozled why it had happened."

"A year later he had another one and he is now on warfarin (a blood thinning drug) for life. It was unexplained. But I have my own suspicions now."

Christopher never fully recovered from the op and was unable to return to work because he was too tired to be on his feet all day. His mental health has also suffered and he now relies on his parents to do everything for him.

And Jean, who worked for the Crown Prosecution Service and the procurator fiscal for 35 years until retiring in 2021, said: "He has become a bit of a recluse."

"Looking back, we should have inquired but, with Eljamel saying the operation was a success, we just thought there was nothing else they could do."

Christopher is unable to walk far and Jean and Tony, 68, can't leave him to fend for himself now.

Jean said: "The operation has ruined his life."

But, like Caroline Duffin, the Reillys only discovered Eljamel had operated on Christopher unsupervised when they got a letter from NHS Tayside a few weeks ago admitting no other neurosurgeon was present and he was "potentially exposed to possible harm."

Jean said: "When I think back when we went into the ward to see him, all the other staff knew what was going on and he was still allowed to carry out these operations during that time. It is a scandal, it is awful."



CONCERNS Elizabeth

LAWYER FEARS PROBE DELAYS

THE lawyer who will represent 123 Eljamel patients has voiced concerns that the public inquiry may be "kicked into the long grass" and urged the Scottish Government to appoint a chairperson quickly.

Elizabeth Rose, founder of L&M MediLaw, expects the number of her clients to increase before the inquiry begins. She said: "I am very

appreciative that we have a public inquiry because a lot of these people are in declining health so I am really concerned about that."

"These people are vulnerable and have serious health conditions. "I don't think it would be fair, given the amount of time that has elapsed, for this to be kicked into the long

grass. I think it is very important that the Scottish Government appoint a chair and start the process."

The Scottish Government said: "The process to appoint a chair for the public inquiry is now under way. "Once appointed, the terms of reference will be developed and the Cabinet Secretary will provide Parliament with an update."