

Leitch's role in Eljamel investigations played down by government



BACKLASH: Appointing Jason Leitch to the Eljamel, inset, investigation would continue the government's legacy of secrecy, campaigners said.

BY JUSTIN BOWIE

The Scottish Government is downplaying senior adviser Jason Leitch's role in setting up investigations into disgraced surgeon Sam Eljamel after a patient backlash.

The Courier revealed this week that the under-fire national clinical director was assigned to organise a sweeping review of all the former NHS Tayside surgeon's cases.

It also emerged Mr Leitch is heading up efforts by his department to establish a long-awaited public inquiry into the scandal.

But the government insists he is not "directly

involved" with this work, even though some of the health officials responsible answer to him.

The government also says the leaders of both major investigations will be fully independent of parliament and the Tayside health board.

Mr Leitch is facing widespread calls to quit his role after damning evidence emerged during this week's Covid inquiry in Edinburgh.

Angry Eljamel campaigners do not have any faith in him and say he should not be involved with work connected to the inquiry or patient reviews.

Patient Jules Rose, from Kinross, raised further concerns over Mr Leitch's suitability for the role after texts showed he joked with Humza Yousaf about "winging it" during the Covid pandemic.

She said: "Jason Leitch is clearly involved, regardless whether this is directly or indirectly. It appears the Scottish Government isn't content with the devastation caused to all victims, but is happy to subject more trauma.

"The latest revelations completely strengthens our concern with Mr Leitch's apparent involvement."

Ms Rose said earlier this week: "Appointing Mr

Leitch to oversee the long-awaited clinical one-to-one reviews would only continue the government's legacy of secrecy, and their inability to understand the word transparency."

Asked whether Mr Leitch was still involved, a government spokesperson said: "The situation has not changed. Government officials working in the directorate co-led by the national clinical director are progressing the necessary work to establish the independent clinical review and public inquiry.

"These will be carried out and chaired independently of both the government and NHS Tayside."

The spokesperson later added that Mr Leitch "has not been directly involved in this work".

The national clinical director was criticised earlier this week after texts showed him telling Mr Yousaf, health secretary at the time, how he could dodge Covid mask rules.

It is understood SNP health chief Michael Matheson said Professor Craig White, the government's associate director for health, has been asked to set up the clinical review.

He told patients that Mr Leitch would play a key role in overseeing this process.