

My brief encounter with disgraced NHS Tayside doctor at his front door



Graeme Strachan

I came face-to-face with Sam Eljamel in August 2015.

Then he disappeared. What would become an international game of cat and mouse had started.

I spent the next five years following his dramatic fall from grace – from the Copacabana Beach in Rio to the United Nations.

The extent of the damage he had done only became clear after Pat Kelly got in touch with The Courier in 2015 and that led to my encounter with Eljamel.

The former Radio Tay DJ had gone under the knife for major back surgery in 2007.

He continued to suffer from chronic back pain and believed the operation was never actually carried out – despite the fact he was opened up on the operating table.

MRI scans showed his discs were in exactly the same position as they were pre-op.

Once we published the story the floodgates effectively opened.

Many more people came forward from across Courier Country claiming they were also left with long-term health difficulties following surgery by Eljamel.

A dedicated national hotline was then set up by top personal injury lawyer Patrick McGuire of Thompson's to identify possible victims on the back of our investigation.

Eljamel then sparked fury in May 2015 when he jetted off to address guests at the 15th International Photodynamic Association (IPA) World Congress at the five-star Belmond

Copacabana Palace Hotel in Rio.

He was travelling the world giving medical talks while suspended in the UK.

Eljamel was also known to have visited Connecticut and his details had recently emerged on a website which was the largest professional network for US physicians.

He had declined to return calls, emails or messages from The Courier and eventually decided to retire from the NHS before being struck off.

So on August 23 2015 I travelled across the Tay Road Bridge to Eljamel's home in Newport to speak to him and see if he would finally break his silence.

It was a quiet cul-de-sac where homes go for up to £330,000.

I knocked and Eljamel appeared at the door.

Knowing the extent of the harm caused by this man, I could actually feel the hair standing up on the back of my neck.

He declined to answer any questions.

Eljamel – remember this was a “world-renowned surgeon” – looked markedly different from how he appeared at the height of his career at Ninewells.

Dressed casually and now sporting a moustache, he quickly disappeared back inside his house when I identified myself as being from The Courier.

“No, no, no,” was his reply as I asked if he wished to discuss relinquishing his licence to practise.

He closed the door. And he was gone.

I didn't realise how long this story would run.

At times it seemed like only The Courier was fighting for his alleged victims.

In December 2015, the case was taken to the United Nations, when the Special Rapporteur for Health was asked to intervene after public inquiry calls were rejected by the Scottish Government.

Liverpool University and Dundee University also investigated claims that Eljamel was pretending to work there as he continued to jet around the globe on

lucrative speaking engagements.

He even designed his own tartan.

New Facebook accounts would appear and disappear just as quickly while his name would be shortened or amended for some speaking engagements.

That way his next pay-day wouldn't show up on a Google search engine.

But whether it was Muftah Salem Eljamel, Sammy Eljamel or plain old Sam, The Courier – and his growing group of alleged victims – would be straight on the phone.

In October 2016 my intervention led to Eljamel's appearance at the Royal Society of Medicine conference in London being hastily cancelled by red-faced organisers when it was brought to their attention that he no longer held a medical licence.

In February 2018, we revealed Eljamel had left Tayside for good.

A BBC Disclosure documentary gave the alleged victims a national platform and police started to quiz the patients and appeared to be working to build a criminal case.

He was also the subject of civil cases in relation to surgery carried out which spent years going through the Court of Session in Edinburgh – with Eljamel nowhere to be seen.

But soon it emerged he was now in Libya, operating as a surgeon at hospitals in the city of Misrata.

He even appeared in an advertising feature for the hospital at one stage.

The announcement yesterday was one I hoped would come, but I'd always doubted it materialising given that successive calls over the years fell on deaf ears.

One wish has been granted and, for the sake of those whose lives were changed forever at the hands of the disgraced surgeon, let's hope a second will follow.

Sam Eljamel must be brought to this public inquiry to face his patients.

It's time for him to stop running.