

Leitch 'not involved' in Eljamel inquiry but his officials working on it

BY JUSTIN BOWIE

Senior health official Professor Jason Leitch is not involved in overseeing investigations into the Eljamel surgery scandal despite officials in his department working on it, the Scottish Government has insisted.

Last September campaigners were told by SNP health chief Michael Matheson that the national clinical director would play a key role in setting up a review of all patients' cases.

Mr Leitch's suitability came under scrutiny due to damning evidence from the UK Covid Inquiry and revelations the high-ranking official is employed by NHS Tayside.

Disgraced Eljamel worked for that health board between 1995 and 2013, leaving multiple patients with life-changing injuries.

But government officials now claim Mr Leitch is playing no part whatsoever in setting up either a public inquiry or one-to-one clinical reviews.

That's despite the fact they admit staff who work in the department led by him are setting up the two major investigations.

This was later echoed by Mr Matheson in Holyrood when he was quizzed by MSPs, even though patients insist he told them Prof Leitch would have a part to play.

The health secretary said: "The national clinical director is not involved in the establishment of the independent clinical review.

"While Prof Leitch is part of the same directorate as those officials, he is not one of the officials undertaking the work."

He said Professor Craig White, associate director for health in the government, was the key official working to find an inquiry chairperson.

However, Mr Matheson's later insistence that there



had been no "direct involvement" from Prof Leitch means questions remain.

Mid Scotland and Fife Tory MSP Liz Smith, who questioned the health secretary, said clarity is essential for patients.

Speaking to The Courier, she said: "I got the impression he was not being clear in the way that I asked whether there had been any indirect involvement of Jason Leitch in the Eljamel case.

"He seemed to rule out that there had been any direct involvement, but he didn't say that about the indirect involvement, which probably means there was some discussion between Jason Leitch and some other people in the case.

"It's absolutely paramount we get the clarity about what that was."

When first asked about Prof Leitch's role last

Tuesday, the Scottish Government insisted anyone picked to chair probes into the scandal will be fully independent.

Outraged victims of Eljamel said this was not good enough, and demanded the national clinical director be removed from the process altogether.

Last Friday, officials then tried to downplay his connection to the inquiry and patient review, claiming he was not "directly involved".

Now they have distanced him even further from the investigations into the scandal, insisting he is completely unconnected to work being carried out by his department.

Calls for Prof Leitch to quit mounted last week when it emerged he advised Humza Yousaf, then health secretary, on how to dodge Covid mask rules during the pandemic.

On Sunday it was revealed he is not employed

CONCERNS:
A government spokesman has said: "Prof Leitch is not involved in work to establish both the independent clinical review and public inquiry."

by the Scottish Government at all, but is instead on secondment from NHS Tayside.

Health board officials said this arrangement began more than 11 years ago and the government covered his lucrative salary in full.

Eljamel's victims, who spent years fighting for a public inquiry, had more questions than answers after Prof Leitch was distanced from the inquiry.

Kinross mum Jules Rose, a leading campaigner, branded the latest claims from the government a "U-turn" given previous comments from Mr Matheson.

She said: "I'm sceptical. Mr Matheson told me about Leitch being involved."

Dundee victim Pat Kelly said: "I'm still sceptical. Why didn't they not just say in the first place he was not involved, directly or indirectly?"