



## GP's take Jeremy Hunt to court over Lewisham A&E cuts

By Marina Soteriou, 02 July 2013

**GP's and other campaigners launched a High Court challenge against health secretary Jeremy Hunt on Tuesday to block plans to downgrade a London hospital.**



Lewisham hospital protest: cuts 'put vulnerable patients at risk' (photo: Save Lewisham Hospital campaign)

Community campaign group Save Lewisham Hospital, chaired by Lewisham GP Dr Louise Irvine, launched a judicial review against Mr Hunt to protect A&E and maternity units at the hospital.

Ahead of the High Court review, Dr Irvine and Lewisham CCG chairwoman Dr Helen Tattersfield gave evidence at a mock inquiry about plans to **downgrade the south east London hospital**. See the videos below.

[Click here to read a statement from Dr Irvine](#)

[Click here to read a statement from Dr Tattersfield](#)

Campaigners warn that vulnerable patients - in particular the elderly and chronically ill - will be hit hardest by the cuts. Lawyers representing the group will argue that the decision to cut Lewisham Hospital's services was unlawful, and that Mr Hunt acted outside his powers by approving them.

Dr Irvine said: 'We believe the decision to downgrade Lewisham A&E and maternity units was taken unlawfully as it does not satisfy the four tests that Jeremy Hunt himself set for any hospital reconfiguration.'

'We also believe using the special administration process for South London Healthcare Trust to effect a reconfiguration of services in Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust, which is not part of South London Healthcare Trust, was wrong.'

The group held a 'Commission of Inquiry', chaired by Michael Mansfield QC, on 29 June. Crossbench peer Lord Owen and Lewisham mayor Sir Steve Bullock spoke out against the plans.

[Click here to read more about the Commission of Inquiry](#)

**In January, Mr Hunt said the A&E unit at Lewisham Hospital would be downsized into a smaller urgent care service, and its existing consultant-led maternity replaced by a midwife-led unit.**

Dr Tattersfield told the inquiry that Lewisham CCG 'completely opposes' the plans. 'It is our judgment that it is vitally important to retain a full range of services at the hospital,' she said.

Dr Irvine, chairwoman of Save Lewisham Hospital, said the changes will 'disrupt all the networks and relationships that GPs in Lewisham have been building' with the hospital.

'So much of medical care, especially for the sickest and the elderly, require joined up work between the different branches of the health and social care system,' she said. 'This is beginning to work in Lewisham on a borough-wide basis.'

A DH spokeswoman said: 'We are confident that the secretary of state and the trust special administrator acted within their powers. We will vigorously defend the challenge by Lewisham Council and Save Lewisham Hospital campaign group. In view of the pending litigation, it would not be appropriate to comment further.'

**Dr Louise Irvine: Witness to the People's Commission of Enquiry**

**Dr Helen Tattersfield: Witness to the People's Commission of Enquiry**

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