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**OVER IN A FEW MINUTES:
CAMPAIGNERS CELEBRATE
HOSPITAL VICTORY FOR
SECOND TIME AS JUDGES
DISMISS GOVERNMENT
APPEAL ● SEE PAGE 6**

'The NHS is not safe in Jeremy Hunt's hands'

HOSPITAL VICTORY BUT CAMPAIGNERS SAY THEY 'MUST REMAIN VIGILANT'

By MANDY LITTLE

HIGH court judges took just three minutes to dismiss the Government's appeal for permission to downgrade Lewisham Hospital.

Speaking after the ruling on Tuesday morning, Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt remained defiant over the need to carve up hospital services across the country.

But, admitting that the speed of the decision had taken them by surprise, members of the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign group announced an impromptu celebration outside the hospital that evening.

The group had spent months fighting the decision to act on an administrator's recommendations to downgrade Lewisham Hospital's A&E and high-risk maternity services.

In July, the High Court ruled that Mr Hunt had acted unlawfully in pushing ahead with the plans, designed to save the neighbouring bankrupt South London Healthcare NHS Trust (SLHT).

The Government launched an appeal which was heard by the Master of the Rolls Lord Dyson and judges Lord Justice Sullivan and Lord Justice Underhill on Monday.

But on Tuesday the appeal was thrown out, meaning the Government must scrap its plans to carve up services at the solvent hospital to rescue the now defunct SLHT - which racked up £150million debts.

Calls have now been made for Mr Hunt, who is planning wider cuts to London hospitals and an extension of the powers of NHS special administrators, to step down.

Save Lewisham Hospital campaign chairwoman, Deptford GP Louise Irvine, said: "We are absolutely elated; it is a great victory.

"The judges recognised the need for a speedy resolution to remove the uncertainty.

"It sends a great message to the rest of the country that it is worth fighting for health services.

"It shows that, if the whole community

comes together, it can make a difference.

"We had great support from Millwall Football Club, trade unionists, pensioners, mums and dads and babies in buggies."

But she said the campaign would continue because "vigilance" was required with further cuts to London hospitals planned.

She said: "Jeremy Hunt should now resign - the NHS is not safe in his hands.

Campaigner Tony O'Sullivan, director of children's services at the newly formed Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust, told the *South London Press*: "We have been vindicated. Jeremy Hunt and [administrator] Matthew Kershaw have been found to be acting unlawfully.

"They were using emergency legislation to enact a major reconfiguration of services without the proper consultation."

Lewisham council Labour group leader Alan Hall said: "It's another big victory for Lewisham and all the campaigners."

Campaigner Vicky Penner said: "The judgement made by the High Court in July was very clear that the Health Secretary had

acted unlawfully. This appeal has been a disgraceful waste of taxpayers' money."

Mayor of Lewisham Sir Steve Bullock said: "This is a great result. I was confident of our case but I am still very relieved."

Mr Hunt said: "We are now looking at the law to make sure that, at a time of great challenge, the NHS is able to change and innovate when local doctors believe it is in the interests of patients."

When the SLHT was dissolved on October 1, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich, merged with Lewisham Hospital.

Queen Mary's Sidcup was taken over by Oxleas NHS Trust and the Princess Royal in Bromley was taken over by King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill.

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JOY: Hospital supporters including porters John Cummings and Isaac Turay Kamara, above, celebrate the victory

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Major protests begin in November last year



Legal challenges are lodged early this year



The High Court backs hospital campaigners in the summer

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Southwark children seeking loving adopters

Southwark Council

