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## EXCLUSIVE:

# Jeremy Hunt humiliated as NHS whistleblower tsar quits before she started

Jeremy Hunt was humiliated after the new NHS whistleblower tsar quit weeks before she was due to start



Quitting: Dame Eileen Sills

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By

**Andrew Gregory**

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**BOOKMARK**

Jeremy Hunt was accused of betraying **NHS whistleblowers** after the tsar appointed to protect them quit before she even started.

And key figures said the blundering Health Secretary put patient safety at risk by hiring nurse Dame Eileen Sills on a part-time basis instead of a full-time, - independent chief as National Guardian.

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She resigned after admitting she could not combine her £174,000-a-year job at one of Britain's busiest hospital trusts with her new two-day role encouraging staff to lift the lid on appalling treatment in the NHS without fear of recrimination.

Dame Eileen was appointed in the wake of the inquiry into 1,400 patient deaths at scandal-hit Stafford Hospital.

And she's kept £174,000-a-year job at top hospital

It waves two fingers at anyone reduced to tears by a thug of a boss, a thug from hell or has the misfortune to witness malpractice". Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said on Thursday.

Thursday Dame Eileen would inspire the NHS to go even further in improving how staff can raise concerns.

Dame Eileen will be based at the offices of NHS watchdog the Care Quality Commission. The only role she has stepped down from at the London trust is executive lead for Speaking Up Safety to prevent any conflict of interest.

The CQC will reimburse Guy and St Thomas' £56,800 a year for their last time. Her duties will include supporting whistleblowers guardians in 100 trusts.

Julie Bailey, who helped expose the neglect at Mid Staff, raised concerns that Dame Eileen, who has advised the Tories on domestic, was an "insider".

She added: "So anyone independent who would challenge and expose NHS bullies was what I had in mind."

Dame Eileen has been a registered nurse for more than 30 years and helped treat victims of the 7/7 London terror attack. She was made a Dame last year.

Guy and St Thomas' said last night: "We have every confidence in Eileen's ability to balance the various demands of these two important roles".

Dame Eileen declined to comment.

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**CHRISTOPHER BUCKTON** Editor

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Julie Bailey, who helped expose the horrific neglect there following the death of her mother, said: "This shows that such an enormous position of great - responsibility should never have been allowed to be diluted to a part-time job. There is no way this is a part-time role and such a suggestion is an insult to whistleblowers."

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Dr Minh Alexander, who was forced to quit after she exposed suicides and abuse at a mental health trust in Cambridgeshire, blamed Mr Hunt for the shambles. She said: "The Health Secretary bears responsibility.

"The design and establishment of the office has been flawed. Patients will suffer if the Government continues to insist upon flawed half-measures."



Health secretary Jeremy Hunt

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Former NHS trust chairman Roy Lilley said the decision to make the job part-time “says we are doing this but not taking it seriously”. He added: “Given the tensions and worries that surround whistleblowing issues it was an affront to frontline staff. The next person should come from outside the NHS and be given a full-time job.

“In a high-pressure, high-risk environment like the NHS it is essential staff are encouraged and feel free to speak up if they see something is not right.” One senior NHS source called the decision to employ a part-time National Guardian a “horrendous joke”.

Dame Eileen, who is Director of Patient Experience and Infection Control at Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust in South London, was due to - officially begin her new job on April 1.

Mr Hunt had praised her January appointment, declaring that he was “confident” she would “inspire” staff to speak out about treatment.

But in a statement, Dame Eileen, a nurse for more than 30 years, said “increasing challenges NHS providers face” meant she could not do “justice to both roles”.

The creation of a National Guardian post was a key demand of Sir Robert Francis who led the Stafford inquiry. He warned patients were at risk of harm because vital information about mistakes and concerns was not routinely being raised by staff.