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Lewisham Hospital legal challenges reach High Court

Robin Cottle, Reporter

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The demonstration led by Save Lewisham Hospital last November

The campaign to save Lewisham Hospital's A&E has reached the High Court this morning, which will hear two judicial reviews trying to prevent services from being downgraded.

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The challenges have been brought by campaign group Save Lewisham Hospital and Lewisham Council, which have been described by the former as "separate but complimentary."

The decision to downgrade Lewisham's A&E and maternity ward is linked to a wider shake-up of south-east London health services brought on by the huge financial problems at nearby South London Healthcare Trust (SLHT).

Trust special administrator Matthew Kershaw included Lewisham Hospital in his report into what should happen with SLHT services after it was placed into special measures.

SLH believe he has gone outside his original remit because the administrator's powers, and therefore those of Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, only related to SLHT.

The legal challenges will be heard by Mr Justice Silber in a three-day hearing. SLH are being represented by law firm Leigh Day and lawyer Rosa Curling said: "At a time when the pressures on accident and emergency services are at record levels his decision to downgrade Lewisham Hospital's service is wrong and unlawful."

Mum-of-three Vicky Penner, part of SLH, thinks the whole of south-east London's healthcare system will suffer if the health secretary's recommendations are ratified.

"At the moment Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the Princess Royal are stretched to breaking point. We want to know the legal justification for closing Lewisham, which is performing at a good level, other than just a way to save money.

"Every borough in London deserves its own fully-operating A&E and maternity services."

Orpington health campaigner Julie Mott says she is unsure which way the hearing will go.

She said: "How long is a piece of string.

"I really hope they get the right decision. The Princess Royal in Bromley and Queen Elizabeth in Woolwich can't cope as it is, there's no room to expand.

"I fear for the future of south-east London healthcare if Jeremy Hunt gets his way."

What do you think of the potential downgrading of Lewisham Hospital services?
Contact the newsroom on 0208 477 3858 or email robin.cottle@archant.co.uk.

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