

Doctors fear speaking up, says whistleblower

By Laura Donnelly

A HEART doctor who turned whistleblower to expose NHS safety fears has spoken of how he was subjected to surveillance and 200 false allegations in an attempt to blacken his name.

Dr Raj Mattu said he felt "vindicated" after winning an unfair dismissal case following a prolonged dispute with hospital bosses.

However, he said he was concerned that too many medical staff saw their careers destroyed if they spoke up for patients and is seeking a meeting with the Health Secretary about the matter.

The victory is believed to be the longest-running and most expensive whistleblowing case in NHS history.

Former colleagues of the hospital consultant said he was "hounded merci-

lessly" out of his job after warning that patients were dying because of cost-cutting introduced by a Coventry hospital.

Dr Mattu was suspended for eight



Dr Raj Mattu said the Coventry hospital he worked for tried to blacken his name after he blew the whistle

years, then sacked, in a case which is already estimated to have cost the NHS at least £6 million. Experts believe he could win damages of up to £10 million.

The cardiologist publicly exposed overcrowding and fears for patient safety at Walsgrave Hospital in Coventry in 2001,

claiming that there may have been avoidable deaths as a result.

He was then "vilified and bullied" by the University Hospital of Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust during a "witch-hunt", according to his lawyers.

Dr Mattu told BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme: "I was rather concerned that the reason I came into medicine, which was to care for patients and to hopefully save lives, was not a priority or certainly a primary aspect of what managers in the hospital in Coventry were focused on.

"Patient safety was regularly put at risk and patients were dying that I felt would not have died at other hospitals."

He said he was forced to turn whistleblower because the trust repeatedly ignored his complaints about patient treatment, including a policy allowing five patients in a ward designed for four.

A year after speaking out the £70,000-a-year doctor was suspended by the trust on full pay after being accused of bullying. He was dismissed in 2010.

Dr Mattu said that following his decision to blow the whistle, the hospital's head of security was asked to monitor him and "try to find as much information to use against me as possible".

"I was accused of fraud, I was accused of sexual impropriety, assaults, not doing my duties and so on," he said.

The trust hired private investigators, who were paid almost £60,000 to investigate the cardiologist's affairs.

He was cleared this week of wrongdoing by Birmingham Employment Tribunal, which ruled he was unfairly dismissed and subjected to "detriments" because he was a whistleblower.

The trust is considering an appeal.