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Cancer sufferer urges patients to stop suing NHS

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Susanne Cameron-Blackie: 'the NHS provides all you need without a penny going to lawyers' ALBAN DONOHOE/ALBANPIX

A woman dying of cancer has started a campaign to curb the compensation culture in the NHS despite suffering two cases of medical negligence herself.

Susanne Cameron-Blackie, 68, from Norfolk, has been given three months to live after being diagnosed with leiomyosarcoma, a soft tissue cancer, six years ago. It has spread through her body, leaving her virtually paralysed.

She is determined to spend her final weeks battling to cut the spiralling costs of litigation against the NHS. Last year, settlements and costs took £1.5bn out of the NHS budget.

NHS Resolution (formerly known as the NHS Litigation Authority) estimates that £56bn could be needed to deal with all cases arising from failures and mistakes made up to March 2016.

“That is the equivalent of half the annual budget of the NHS,” said Cameron-Blackie. She suffered in her early twenties when her womb was removed without permission as she was

undergoing a dilation and curettage procedure. During recent treatment she was given another patient's medication, leaving her in agony.

"But I didn't sue," Cameron-Blackie said. "The money from the original operation would have made no difference, I just got on with my life. The second time, I would not have got anything — the money would have gone to my husband in a few years' time. What good would that do?"

"Even the valid claims where somebody gets £6m and it's entirely justified, that money goes into the court of protection and all their needs are met by the NHS.

"It is whether there is a fault that matters. If you can't prove a fault, then you can have a patient with exactly the same damage, exactly the same needs and they are met in exactly the same way, but there is no payout."

Cameron-Blackie, who formerly worked for the lord chancellor's office, has returned home after her latest hospital treatment. The NHS has installed a bed and oxygen in her home on the Norfolk Broads.

"When the chips are down and you are left like this, the NHS provides everything and more that you need without a penny piece going anywhere near lawyers," she said.

Cameron-Blackie is likely to find widespread support for her campaign.

Rob Hendry, medical director at the Medical Protection Society, which represents healthcare professionals, said: "A package of legal reforms is required to control the spiralling cost of clinical negligence, including a fixed cap on the legal fees that can be charged."

A spokesman for NHS Resolution said it aimed to settle claims fairly and quickly. "We also have a responsibility to defend unjustified claims robustly. We received 10,965 new clinical negligence claims in 2015-16 [and] resolved 4,935 (46%) of clinical negligence claims without the payment of damages."

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