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Teen in Google AI Doctor Case Says Tribunal Silenced Her

July 15, 2025

– Categories: *Human Rights*



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A disabled woman known as “Patient A” says she was denied the chance to speak at the disciplinary hearing that suspended a Google-linked doctor over their relationship, which began when she was a minor.

The case centres on Dr. Cian Hughes, who has become a senior clinical specialist at Google Health, focusing on artificial intelligence in healthcare. Dr. Hughes was suspended

from practising medicine for one year by the Medical Practitioners' Tribunal Service after admitting to a sexual relationship with Patient A that began when she was between 16 and 18, despite having first met her as a patient at age 13. Importantly, the two first met when she was just 13 and he was a trainee doctor treating her at Bristol Children's Hospital in England.

Patient A, who is now 28, said she had prepared to testify in person about the impact of the relationship. However, she was informed weeks before the hearing that her live testimony was no longer needed because Dr. Hughes had admitted to parts of the allegations. She told *Bristol Live*, “What I feared would happen was exactly what happened. Dr. Hughes got to give evidence first-hand, and I was denied a voice.”

She argued that relying solely on her written statements failed to capture the reality of what she experienced. According to Patient A, the tribunal leaned heavily on Dr. Hughes's own description of the relationship and selected text messages, which she believes distorted the nature of their involvement. The tribunal described the relationship as “loving,” but acknowledged a serious breach of professional boundaries, citing the imbalance of power and her vulnerable circumstances.

Patient A also emphasised the lack of awareness among young people about the two legal ages of consent in the United Kingdom. The standard age of consent is 16, but when one party is in a position of trust or authority, the minimum is 18. She said, “I simply wasn't told that there are two ages of consent. Young people should be informed about this much more clearly.”

The relationship came to the attention of police in 2020. While officers decided not to pursue criminal charges, they passed the case to the General Medical Council, which oversees medical regulation. The Medical Practitioners' Tribunal Service maintained that her written testimony was fully considered and said it is typical for witnesses to be excused from appearing if their statements are uncontested. A spokesperson commented, “We do not believe it would be correct to say the patient was denied a voice.”

A representative for the University Hospitals Bristol and Weston National Health Service Foundation Trust, which operates the children's hospital, insisted that patient safety remains a priority and that any inappropriate conduct is unacceptable. Meanwhile, the University of Bristol defended its training programs for medical students placed in local hospitals, though the broader handling of the case raises questions about accountability within the system.

Patient A has since called for greater education in schools so vulnerable teenagers understand when a relationship crosses legal and ethical boundaries. Her experience underscores concerns that institutions sometimes place procedural convenience above victims' rights to be heard.