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## Covid-19: PM's former chief aide accuses health secretary of lying over PPE and access to treatment

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The prime minister's former chief adviser Dominic Cummings has launched an incendiary attack on England's health secretary's handling of the covid-19 pandemic, accusing Matt Hancock of "lying to everybody on multiple occasions."

In an evidence session before MPs from the health and science select committees on 26 June, Cummings claimed that Hancock, under pressure to explain the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) last April, had falsely accused NHS England's chief Simon Stevens and the Treasury of blocking orders.

Cummings said a subsequent investigation by the now former cabinet secretary Mark Sedwill found this to be false, prompting both Cummings and Sedwill to urge the prime minister to remove Hancock from his post.

Cummings said, "The secretary of state for health should have been fired for at least 15 to 20 things, including lying to everybody on multiple occasions in meeting after meeting in the cabinet room and publicly." He added, "I said repeatedly to the prime minister he should be fired, so did the cabinet secretary, and so did many other senior people."

When asked by the committee to give evidence to back up his claims, Cummings said, "In April last year, just before the prime minister and I were diagnosed with having covid ourselves, the secretary of state for health told us in the cabinet room 'everything is fine on PPE, we've got it all covered.'

"When I came back (from being unwell), almost the first meeting I had in the cabinet room was about the disaster over PPE, and how we were actually completely short and hospitals all over the country were running out.

"The secretary of state said in the meeting, 'this is the fault of Simon Stevens, of the chancellor of the exchequer, it's not my fault, they've blocked approvals of all sorts of things.' I said to the cabinet secretary, 'please investigate this and find out if it's true.' The cabinet secretary came back to me and said, 'it's completely untrue. I have lost confidence in the secretary of state's honesty in these meetings.' The cabinet secretary said that to me and he said that to the prime minister."

Cummings added, "The cabinet secretary said to the prime minister that the British system 'is not set up to deal with a secretary of state who repeatedly lies in meetings, we can't operate like that'."

Cummings said there were "numerous" other examples to support his accusations against Hancock, including in summer 2020 when the health secretary said that everybody that needed treatment got the treatment they required during the pandemic.

"He knew that was a lie because he'd been briefed by the chief scientific adviser and chief medical officer about the first peak. We were told explicitly that people didn't get the treatment they deserve. Many people were left to die in horrific circumstances."

Cummings added, "There are many senior people who, during the pandemic, fell disastrously below the standards which the country has a right to expect. The secretary of state for health is certainly one of those people." He said the prime minister "came close" to sacking Hancock in April 2020, "but just wouldn't fundamentally do it."

Cummings later claimed that Hancock's obsession with "hitting his stupid target" to deliver 100 000 covid tests a day by the end of April had hindered Whitehall's efforts to properly plan and set up the new test and trace system.

He said, "We had half the government, with me in number 10, calling round frantically saying, 'do not do what Hancock says, build the thing properly for the medium term.' And we had Hancock calling them all, saying, 'down tools on this, do this, hold tests back so that I can hit my target.' In my opinion he should have been fired for that alone. It was criminal, disgraceful behaviour that caused serious harm."

The Department of Health and Social Care and the secretary of state have been approached for comment.