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Attempts by the SNP to smear a nurse who tackled Nicola Sturgeon during last night's TV leaders' debate reveals "something endemic" within the party.

The audience member criticised the First Minister on the BBC programme last night, saying the Scottish Government had failed to resource nursing sufficiently.

However, instead of heeding the warnings, the SNP's spin operation immediately swung into action, wrongly accusing her of being married to a Conservative councillor.

These false claims were spread by the SNP's candidate for Edinburgh South West, Joanna Cherry, who was later forced into a grovelling apology.

The accusations sparked an onslaught of online abuse towards the nurse from nationalist supporters on social media.

It's not the first time the SNP has rounded on a member of the public voicing legitimate concerns.

Before the independence referendum, party officials tried to smear Clare Lally, the mother of a disabled child, who spoke out against independence.

Scottish Conservative MSP Murdo Fraser said:

"It was a disgraceful episode and Nicola Sturgeon and her party should be thoroughly ashamed.

"This smear operation points to something endemic within the SNP.

"Its supporters talk over critics, not listen. And the nationalists will always try to play the man not the ball. This kind of behaviour is utterly unacceptable.

"Ruth Davidson and the Scottish Conservatives will speak up for anyone at this election who wants to fight back against the SNP.

"People have had enough. We can send them a clear message at this campaign, and make them listen for once."

For more on the SNP smears about the nurse from the TV debate, visit:
<https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/snp/nicola-sturgeon/news/86121/snp-mp-apologises-after-smearing-nurse-who>

The episode was similar to when the SNP was forced to apologise to the mother of a disabled child who spoke out against independence:
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2656038/SNP-spin-doctor-forced-apologise-email-mother-disabled-child-trashed-internet-trolls-opposing-independence.html>