

The APLA Update

Lawyers For the People

APLA
Australian
Plaintiff
Lawyers'
Association
(APLA) Inc

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PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Peter Semmler Q.C., APLA President

At this critical stage of its growth, APLA is fortunate to have secured the services of Therese Bateman as its new Executive Officer to replace Anne Purcell. Therese is eminently well qualified for the position. She has a BA and a LLB degree and has considerable experience in public relations and marketing of professional services. Her attributes include both business acumen and a passionate commitment to social equity, qualities which she shares with many APLA members.

She has some innovative ideas on how the association, having established itself as an activist group of 400 plaintiff-oriented lawyers over 18 months, might now consolidate its position by increasing its membership and services and raising its public profile. Therese has extensive experience in media relations and image promotion. She has also organised conferences for professionals in the past. APLA will gain the benefit of that experience in the organisation of its first national conference to be held at Noosa Heads later this year. Therese will commence work as APLA's executive officer in mid-February.

The changes which would restrict the rights of the victims of negligence which I have referred to in previous APLA *Updates* are not always instigated by economic rationalist politicians.

In a recent issue of the Australian Doctor Weekly, the following appeared as part of an advertisement for United Medical Defence, one the of the largest medical defence organisations in the country.

"...the system as it stands seems to favour patients more out of sympathy for their illnesses than as victims of truly "negligent" practice. In other words a patient with an ailment a doctor has done everything in his or her power to remedy will still be awarded damages even though correct medical procedures have been followed.

...The tendency of these spheres of social influence to lay the blame for a patient's suffering wholly and solely on the shoulders of doctors is also a trend we wish to curb through the pro-active lobbying of government on behalf of our members."

Statements such as these not only display an outmoded view as to who should ultimately decide as a matter of law whether "correct" medical procedures have been followed. They also demonstrate how vigilant organisations such as APLA must be in ensuring that the other side of the story, that of the victim of careless professional conduct, is forcefully put before those who are responsible for law reform in this country.

Contents

1.
President's Page
2.
Negligence of
Highway Authorities
6.
Capital Gains Tax
on Injury Awards
6.
Hidden Hazards of
Defective Products:
Now and in the Future
9.
Abortion Retried
13.
Technology for
Plaintiff Lawyers
14.
Spouses' Claims on
Damages Awards
15.
Brain Injury: The Most
Overlooked Injury by
Doctors and Lawyers
17.
New Zealand
Personal Injury Claims
18.
Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease -
Is a Duty of Care owed?
21.
New Members
22.
State Branch Reports
24.
APLA Exchange