

Medical Law Conference

By Sarah Yellop



Australian Lawyers Alliance CEO, Eva Scheerlinck, presenting a certificate of appreciation to Bill Madden for his many years of dedication to the Medical Law Special Interest Group.



Delegates enjoying the Sydney sunshine – Richard Royle, NSW President of the Australian Lawyers Alliance and Mary Walters from the Litigation Assistance Fund in South Australia.

Customs House at Circular Quay provided an impressive venue for an equally impressive conference. This year's Medical Law Conference recorded the highest level of attendance to date, with more than 60 delegates representing most states.

The keynote address was delivered by his Honour Justice Timothy Studdert of the NSW Supreme Court, a professional negligence list judge in Sydney since October 2000. He provided excellent practical advice regarding the rule of separate determination and the likely application of the single expert rule. Justice Studdert also discussed the implications of the rule on concurrent evidence, whose application to medical negligence cases seems inevitable.

The medical presentations provided a useful insight into the realities of medical practice and invaluable guidance for assessing and conducting medical negligence claims.

Dr Mary McCaskill, Head of Emergency Medicine at the Children's Hospital, Westmead, spoke about the pitfalls of paediatric emergency medicine. The complexities of identifying whether a child with a high temperature is suffering from a cold or a serious bacterial infection are truly frightening.

Dr Daniel Challis, clinical leader of maternal foetal medicine at the Royal Hospital for Women, provided a useful insight into various antenatal screening tests.

Dr John Gunning, head of cardiology at the Royal North Shore Hospital, gave an interesting presentation on the failure to diagnose heart attacks, focusing on the 'SALAMI' and 'ETAMI' treatment strategies that have been trialled in NSW. Patients suspected of suffering a heart attack within 50 kilometres of the regional Heart Centre at the RNSH are taken there immediately, rather than attending a district

hospital and then being transferred. Statistics show a very positive outcome because of the time saved.

After lunch, David Hirsch presented on failed sterilisation cases, and Dr Andrew Korda, gynaecologist at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Medical Centre, spoke about obstetric sphincter injuries. His presentation was accompanied by photographs that had us all squirming in our seats.

Associate Professor Cameron Stewart from Macquarie University introduced us to the legal issues surrounding end-of-life decisions and withdrawing treatment. This thought-provoking presentation demonstrated the legal and moral complexities surrounding this issue.

Following the conference, we moved to a bar in the heart of Circular Quay for drinks and canapés, sponsored by ipac. It was a relaxing end to an intensive and informative day.

The quality of the presentations was outstanding, and thanks must go to the conference organising committee, Eva, Maja, Alliance staff and to event sponsors, Ability One, Evidex and ipac.

Our thanks must also go to Bill Madden, who has chaired the national medical law special interest group for many years. Bill announced at the conference that he would be stepping down and that David Hirsch would be taking over as chair. Bill has been a very active and inspiring leader of the medical law SIG and has been instrumental in many of the group's achievements over the last few years. It is appropriate that the last conference organised by him should have been such a resounding success. ■

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