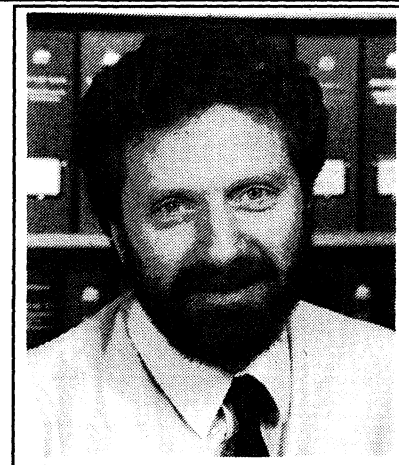


Client Care an Issue



The Master has requested that the Society remind all practitioners of the need to comply with the provisions of the Legal Practitioners' Act and his directions with regard to trust funds and the Legal Practitioners' Fidelity Fund under sections 67, 70, 72, 73 and 90 of the Act. Below is a table advising due dates for compliance.

LEGAL PRACTITIONERS' ACT

1. By close of business 7 July - engage auditor (s67(1));
2. By close of business 7 August - inform Master the name of auditor ((S67(1));
3. By 31 August - report to be prepared; duplicate to be forwarded to Master by **practitioner** as soon as possible after that date (s70(5));
4. Where report not received - **practitioner** send Master stat dec (s72(1) (c) (d) (e) and (f));
5. If no trust monies held - by close of business 14 July, stat dec to Master (s73)
6. By 30 September - contribution to Legal Practitioners' Fidelity Fund of \$100 **per partner** (s90).

I ask that all practitioners observe these due dates and avoid the necessity for any follow-up action to be taken which is time consuming for both the practitioner concerned and the Society.

Complaint Concern

A recent report in the *Melbourne Age* notes that the new Legal Ombudsman in Victoria has received 300 complaints against practitioners in that state since 1st January. Victoria has approximately 7,000 legal practitioners.

I note with great concern that this Society has received in excess of 60 complaints over the same period. There are approximately 350 legal practitioners in this territory, including a high proportion of government lawyers.

This should be of concern to every Northern Territory practitioner, particularly taking into account the fact that many complaints are due to an apparent lack of ability to communicate effectively with clients.

I ask that all practitioners review their client care procedures in an endeavour to reduce this alarming and disproportionate growth of complaints against members of the profession in the Northern Territory.

With an increase in the numbers of complaints, it follows that discipline also becomes an issue and I quote the words of Mr R Shawn

Smith, QC, President of the Law Society of Saskatchewan who said in his President's Report in January:

"Discipline remains a costly, unpleasant but essential responsibility of the Law Society. It is critical that the membership understand that although the Benchers are elected by the membership, the Benchers represent not only their interests, but the interest of the public. Self government is a privilege and with it comes the obligation to serve and protect the public interest. The discipline process is at the core of that obligation." I support those sentiments.

Law Week

Dates for Law Week are 25 - 31 May. The Secretariat will be coordinating activities to mark this national focus on the legal profession and the issues confronting it in 1997. This year's theme nationally will be *Access To Justice*, the theme adopted by the Law Society of the NT in 1996.

As ever, practitioner input into the planning of activities and support for functions arranged is vital. Law Week is an opportunity for the profession to highlight the services it offers. Please take some time to consider how best your profession can be represented during this focus week and pass your ideas on to the Secretariat.