

Wildly popular careers guide re-launched

By Caitlin McInnis

When we first launched the Public Interest Law Careers Guide with the Progressive Law Network in 2013, more than 30,000 people logged on to take a look at it in the first month alone. It showed just how popular alternative law careers are for this generation of students.

To mark the guide's second edition, we again teamed up with the PLN for a lively evening featuring a number of human rights lawyers talking about the varied paths they've taken since leaving university.

Lee Carnie from Human Rights Law Centre spoke of the value she places on her time working in the community legal centre sector. She said that volunteering is an important part of gaining practical experience and working out what you do and don't like, while also helping others. **Her advice:** Volunteer for organisations you are interested in; and do it because you like it, not because it will bolster your resume.

Holly Tan has just started in the Department of Premier and Cabinet working as a policy officer. Her practical experience at the Monash Oakleigh Legal Service was a great start as it opened other doors and clarified what she was passionate about. Following this, Holly contacted the Department of Premier and Cabinet and, with a little persistence, secured a paid internship. This, and her experience working with clients who have faced family violence, led her to her current position in the Family Violence Reform Unit. **Her advice:** you don't have to be a lawyer, you can create opportunities for yourself.

Working at the Victorian Government Solicitors office has been a challenge in the best way for **Katharine Brown**. Katharine participated in the Castan Centre's 2015 Global Internship program and found that the experience, together with a clerkship, prepared her well for the workforce. **Her advice:** make sure you think not just about what you might be interested in, but your personality and whether the day-to-day work environment will satisfy you.

Alina Leikin, also a lawyer at the Human Rights Law Centre, showed how you can take a very different path into a human rights career. After doing clerkships at three law firms, she worked at King & Wood Mallesons before moving to the Human Rights Law Centre. **Her advice:** never underestimate the power of cold calling people and asking for advice.

Until recently, there was no comprehensive directory of human rights law opportunities in Victoria. The Public Interest Law Careers Guide helps to fill that gap and is designed to help tertiary students, graduates, lawyers and high school careers counsellors. It includes information on many areas of law including government, asylum seekers, human rights, and animal law. There are also testimonials from people working in the various fields.

We would like to thank Kirsti Weisz and her PLN team for their tireless work updating the guide. The result is a testament to their hard work.

You can access the guide here.

“Then they held me down” – the ethics of mandatory treatment

By Amanda Ngo

A packed Castan Centre event recently heard a panel of speakers deal with the ethics of mandatory medical treatment in Australia. The panel was directed by Professor Ian Freckleton QC for an hour of stimulating and thought-provoking conversation that questioned the continued use of mandated treatment in the medical profession.

Throughout the country, medical professionals use certain practices without a patient's consent, including involuntary administration of medication, detention in an institution or decisions made by professionals against the patient's wishes.

Chris Ryan, a distinguished psychiatric clinician and professor, offered an insight into the considerations of a medical practitioner. Melbourne University's Bernadette McSherry focused on the positive international law obligations States owe to patients undergoing treatment. Victoria Legal Aid's Eleanor Fritze brought her experience with patients who have been subject to these laws. Lastly, Cath Roper, a consumer academic with decades of experience in mental health, promoted a more open-minded attitude to diversity.

These experts tackled the legality and morality of treatment orders administered by tribunals and courts when a patient either refuses or is incapable of providing consent. This practice can cover patients who suffer from mental illness, brain injuries or substance-dependence. Australia has received condemnation from the UN for its mandatory treatment laws, and the UN Committee for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) has

indicated that such laws contravene our international obligations.

Ryan shared the perspective of the medical profession, being that mandatory treatment is essential to resolve situations where patients are incapable of making their own decisions. However, it was also argued that these practices violated the UNCPRD and the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act, including freedoms of liberty and privacy.

This was supplemented by the call for stronger support systems. McSherry highlighted the narrow focus that has directed much of the discourse surrounding the implementation of the UNCPRD. This has led to States ignoring the positive obligations required of them, including measures to improve public health resources, and instead focusing on substituted decision-making. Further, the panel indicated the need to reform practices to ensure current safeguards are adequately enforced, to guarantee that involuntary treatment is truly utilised as a last resort.

Finally, the panellists raised the importance of communication in practitioner-patient relationships. Through encouraging earlier discussions about treatment with the patient, medical practitioners can open discussion and avoid the emergency use of force.

The discussion kicked off an important dialogue about mental health laws, and the fine line they tread between the right of self-autonomy and the need to protect patients who are vulnerable.

A video of this event is available on our [YouTube channel](#).