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Silk 2000

Personal

I was born in Blackpool, attended St. Joseph's College, and from there to Cambridge to read law at Trinity Hall. I spent three 3 happy years at that college, was given an excellent education both in law and life and have very fond memories and good friends from my time at university.

I joined chambers in 1979 and from the start of my professional life was always interested in personal injury work, it was the sense of being able to help and make a difference to the lives of those I represented that gave me such satisfaction and interest in this type of work.

Practice

My junior practice gradually evolved into an exclusively personal injury and clinical negligence practice, appearing both for claimants and defendants. In 1993 I dropped all other types of work to concentrate on the above two areas and as time went by I began to practise mainly for claimants.

However, I still maintained a practice for defendants in clinical negligence working for health authorities and trusts, but also defending individual clinicians. That experience was particularly useful in reminding me that it is not only the injured who are traumatised by the litigation process but those who are alleged to have been negligent. I feel that that area of work gave me the necessary balance required in the specialist advisory role of counsel in this field of expertise. I continue to maintain my interest in clinical negligence work both in the cases in which I advise and also as the current chairman of the Northern Circuit Medical Law Association whose main purpose is to extend the knowledge of junior practitioners in medical law issues.

Since taking Silk my work has further refined to specific areas of practice. I spend the majority of my time representing those with severe brain injury. Each case brings its own complexities and challenges, some more than others. By way of example, I specifically recall a case where I acted for a very severely brain injured young man who could neither walk nor talk by reason of his injury. During the course of the case, I referred my solicitor to a particular neuropsychologist, who despite the client's inability to speak, was able to prove the client understood his environment and could communicate with the aid of technology. That break through, probably meant as much to his parents who had always maintained their son understood them, as the award of £4.75 million in compensation which was achieved in the case.

Spinal injury features significantly in my case load, a number of those claims have involved servicemen and women pursuing claims against the Ministry of Defence, military litigation brings with it its own complexities.

I also have a special interest in cases concerning complex regional pain syndrome and chronic pain syndrome, a common feature of which litigation is a feeling of hopelessness on the part of clients who feel no one believes they are genuine in their suffering.

I cannot leave my practice special interests without mentioning amputees. The first catastrophic case I became involved with was for a young amputee. In the course of her case, I was to learn much about the negative effect of the litigation process on the client. The experience shaped my practice life in that I determined that I would use her case as an example of a way a case should not be run. I have always tried to pursue cases in which I am involved in a proactive way wishing to be brought in to advise at an early stage on the strategy to be pursued and experts to be instructed. Amputee litigation has also provided me with many rewarding experiences of the value of rehabilitation from an early stage and of the human spirit overcoming adversity.

Away from work, as a family we love skiing and as parents have come to accept that our boys will always outdo us in this regard. However, I have proved that I can still outrun the two eldest of my boys in the Great North Run, the youngest Greg, now aged 17 is still avoiding the challenge to compete.

Another passion has been my involvement with a group of friends wine tasting, which amongst other things has taken us on some memorable trips to the vineyards of France and in particular those of Burgundy. I have recently formed my own book group which has broadened my reading immensely and has also introduced me to the delights of the Hay Book Festival.

Over the past few years I have been involved to a small degree as a Trustee of a children's hospice, whose achievements I am immensely proud to be associated with and am grateful for the opportunity to share in so many uplifting experiences.