

Sex-change man to sue

Taxpayers' money sought to fund misdiagnosis claim



Michelle Rose

A MAN is suing doctors he claims wrongly advised him to have a sex-change operation.

Alan Michael Finch, 36, alleges he was misdiagnosed as a transsexual when he sought help from the Gender Identity Clinic, based at the Monash Medical Centre.

Taxpayers will be asked to help fund his legal fight against Southern Health, two psychiatrists, an obstetrician, and a plastic surgeon.

Mr Finch, who was 19 at the time, claims he was inadequately counselled and advised too quickly to have a sex-change operation.

Lawyer Anne Shortall, of Arnold Thomas and Becker, said Mr Finch would ask the County Court to award "significant compensation" for pain and suffering, medical costs and loss of earning capacity.

It is believed the claim amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

In a statement of claim, Mr Finch alleges he visited the clinic in 1986 suffering psychiatric problems he believed were caused by "gender dysphoria and/or confused gender identity."

Mr Finch alleges he was diagnosed as "suffering from transsexualism" after three consultations, and advised that gender reassignment was an appropriate treatment.

His transformation to "Helen" was complete two years later.

But in 1996, he realised the sex change had been a mistake, Ms Shortall said.

Mr Finch claims the clinic's diagnosis did not meet the criteria of someone suffering from transsexualism, such as a conviction since childhood that he was a woman, a disgust with his genitals, and a preoccu-

pation with stereotypical female activities.

He also alleges that doctors did not take an adequate history, including details of a poor relationship with his father that he claims may have contributed to his sexual identity confusion.

Ms Shortall said Mr Finch would ask Legal Aid for funding for the case, to be heard by a jury, on the grounds of public interest.

"It's in the public interest to look at what the centre is doing — whether or not (it) is operating within the appropriate guidelines," she said.

A Southern Health spokesman said the clinic would vigorously defend the claim.

"No medical services were provided to him at either Monash Medical Centre or by Southern Health," he said.

Ms Shortall said Mr Finch suffered chronic depression and had difficulty keeping jobs because of the sex change.

He had worked at a major telecommunications company, but was retrenched after reverting to being a man, she said.

Though he has had breast implants removed and taken hormones to revert to being a man, he has been told gender reassignment is irreversible.

"He will never really be in a position where he will be able to live normally as a male again," Ms Shortall said.

A directions hearing at the County Court has been scheduled for May 24 next year.

Man's jail battle

AN Australian jailed in Indonesia after his former employer accused him of theft has vowed to fight the charges as medical tests confirmed he was suffering typhoid.

Darin Seagrove, 38, was arrested by police in Bogor, south of Jakarta, last month after a dispute with his former German employer, refrigeration equipment manufacturer Bitzer.

Mr Seagrove had been employed by the company in July 2001 to be technical manager of a new plant the firm was building in Indonesia.

Hardly a blip on the radar

Terry Brown

CASE-BY-CASE EXEMPTION APPLIED FOR HEADS OF STATE AND VIPs

KIWI Prime Minister Helen Clark has been called many things, but never a bombshell.

But her surprise frisking for explosives this week sent diplomatic pulses, at least, racing.

A less intrusive *Herald Sun* probe, however, found she isn't the only hard-to-place regional leader. If appearances count, she's not the only one at risk from such frisky business.

Much like Sydney airport security, nine random Australians, and one Kiwi, struggled to identify Pacific leaders.

And none could identify Senator Chris Ellison — our Minister in charge of national security — who was less recognisable, even, than Malaysian PM Abdullah Badawi.

"New Guinea High Commissioner?" Warren Eldridge guessed when shown Senator Ellison's picture.

Visiting Auckland student Kim Kempthorne was closer.

"He kind of looks Australian," she said. "Don't know. We only get John Howard (on TV) and, what's the chick that got sent to jail?"

NEW Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark could have avoided the third degree screening she received from Australian airport officials by applying for a VIP exemption.

Prime Minister John Howard says he is more than happy to be frisked in the name of airline safety.

When it comes to airport security not everyone is equal.

Transport Minister John Anderson confirmed yesterday that heads of state and VIPs can avoid the ignominy of a public frisking by airport officials.

"Everything is considered on a case-by-case basis," a spokesman said.

Prime Minister Clark's embarrassment on October 28 would have been avoided if she

had applied for the exemption, according to the Government.

Ms Clark had changed her flight plans and travelled through Sydney rather than Darwin on her way to Dubai taking officials by surprise, who scanned her for explosives.

However, VIPs including everyone from soccer stars to Hollywood celebrities wanting to avoid the media can make applications for exemption through the Aviation Security Branch of the department.

Heads of state, including queens and presidents, can also seek their exemptions through the ceremony and hospitality section of the Prime Minister's Department.

— Gerard McManus

The *Herald Sun* had six pictures: the Fijian and Indonesian presidents, the PMs of New Zealand, Japan and Malaysia, and Senator Ellison.

Just over half could pick out

Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri — although Chris Robertson thought she was former Pakistani PM Benazir Bhutto.

Paul Watson, however, cor-

rectly identified "the Indonesian chick".

Despite being pictured in a stetson, Japanese PM Junichiro Koizumi was picked by six out of the 10 — though only one knew his name.

Ms Kempthorne thought he was "the Chinese guy who was in Auckland a while ago".

She was spot-on with Miss Clark, as were half of the 10 surveyed. "Her teeth are the worst in the world," Ms Kempthorne pointed out.

But Jeanette Gordon was not so sure about Miss Clark's identity. "She's in the Greens, right? Or she might be in the Senate?" she guessed.

"They're sort of second level leaders. It's hard to pick up."

A couple guessed Fijian President Ratu Josefa Iloilo and one genuinely recognised Malaysia's PM, Mr Badawi.

But John Becroft thought Fiji's president was from the Solomons. Miss Clark, however, was no challenge. She'd been in the news.

"She was frisked at the airport," he said.

"It's a disgrace, really."

User-pays unis spark big row

THE Government's shake-up of universities has begun its rocky path through the Senate, where opposition parties are planning to reject the reforms.

The higher education proposals include more funding for universities tied to workplace reforms, a doubling in the number of full-fee paying student places, and possible HECS increases of up to 30 per cent.

Labor, the Australian Democrats and the Greens all said yesterday that they would oppose the package.

This means the Government needs the votes of the four independents.

Labor's research and science spokesman, Kim Carr, said the changes would deepen inequalities and undermine economic and social prosperity. "It pretends to cut red tape, to free up universities,

while it is actually binding them hand and foot," he told Parliament.

"The fact remains that this Bill is a cynical attempt to bring our public universities to heel."

The Democrats' higher education spokeswoman, Natasha Stott Despoja, said the package deserved to be tossed out.

"We believe these Bills represent the largest single attack on higher education in our country's history," she said.

The Greens called on their fellow senators to join them in opposing the radical package.

Greens Senator Kerry Nettle said if the Bill were passed, Australia's higher education system would become a quagmire over user-pays ideology. —AAP



Sir Joh

Sir Joh's fighting fit

RUMOURS that Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was seriously ill were unfounded, his wife said last night.

Lady Flo said that her husband, 92, had gone to hospital for a routine check-up.

His health had not deteriorated.

US overstates uranium exports

Mark Dunn

THE nuclear watchdog is investigating how the United States miscalculated receiving 11,000 tonnes of Australian uranium.

The discrepancies have been blamed on US Department of Energy accounting and software procedures, which massively overstated Australian uranium exports.

The Australian Safeguards and Non-proliferation Office says Australia exported 9592 tonnes, worth \$425 million, in 2002-03, about 4055 tonnes to the US.

ASNO assistant secretary Andrew Leask said it was satisfied with

the explanations for the various inaccuracies.

Mr Leask said ASNO and the International Atomic Energy Agency placed tight restrictions on uranium shipments to prevent diversion into weapons programs.

He confirmed Australian uranium had been used in US and UK weapons programs until the early 1960s but had since been prohibited from use in military programs, including propulsion systems for nuclear navies. Australia supplies uranium to the

US, UK and France for what ASNO says is verifiably peaceful purposes.

Israel, India and Pakistan have a recognised nuclear capability but refuse to become signatories to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and Australia does not sell uranium to them.

ASNO defends the system as a successful deterrent but a Senate inquiry in 1997 found there could never be a 100 per cent guarantee international uranium movements could not be utilised for weapons.

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