

## 'SIT DOWN GIRLIE'



### Sorry saga

The sorry saga of the so-called 'Late abortion case' is finally drawing to a close. It began in 2001 when a woman had a termination of her pregnancy at 32 weeks, following a diagnosis of skeletal dysplasia or 'dwarfism', and extreme psychological distress on the part of the pregnant woman. Subsequently the doctors involved were suspended from the Royal Women's Hospital but later reinstated. Anti-abortionist Senator Julian McGauran then got hold of the woman's medical records from the Coroner's office and sent them to several agencies including the Medical Practitioners' Board of Victoria and to at least one journalist. The Medical Practitioner's Board subpoenaed the Hospital to obtain the woman's records so they could investigate the doctors following a complaint to the Board made by McGauran. After several court cases, the Hospital was obliged to give the records to the Board which then decided to take no further action.

One of the doctors involved successfully asked the Supreme Court of Victoria to lift the suppression order on his name and he has gone public telling his side of the story. This is in the 11 January edition of *The Bulletin* by Julie-Anne Davies. Lachlan De Crespigny and Julian Savulesco also published an article in the *Herald Sun* (23 January 2008) under the title 'When mums come first' highlighting the dangers in drawing arbitrary lines beyond which abortion is difficult or inaccessible. They called for decriminalisation of abortion. Victorians are now awaiting the report and recommendations of their Law Reform Commission on this issue.

### Down with abortion

In the United States a comprehensive study of abortion has shown a dramatic drop in the number being performed (*The Age* 18 January 2008). The Report by the Guttmacher Institute was released days before the 35th anniversary of the famous US case of *Roe v Wade* in which the Supreme Court legalised abortion. There was a peak in numbers of the procedure in 1990 and this has since reduced by 25 per cent to 1.2 million a year. In the early 1980s one in three pregnant women chose abortion and it is now closer to one in five. Randall O'Bannon, Director of 'Education and Research' for the anti-abortion group National Right to Life considers the drop in numbers to be 'encouraging'. Girlie says 'who cares'; the choice should be that of the women. Alternatives such as medical abortions are now available and women can, with medical supervision, avoid surgery and also not be threatened and harassed by picketers at the clinics. Some states have tried to control them with 'Bubble zones' where protestors are not legally allowed to enter.

### Women drivers

Since 1932 women in Saudi Arabia have been banned from driving. This is about to change — not because the deeply-conservative state wants greater freedom for women, but in a bid to stem rising protests and calls for greater freedoms for women. Despite being threatened with detention and loss of livelihood, protestors have been defying the bans by driving vehicles anyway. Donna Abu-Nasr (*The Age* 22 January 2008) also reports that authorities in Saudi Arabia have decided to allow women to stay in hotels on their own. Donna also reports on the plight of a Saudi married couple who have been forcibly separated by the state. A knock on their door turned out to be the police advising them their marriage had been annulled by a judge and that they could no longer live together. The wife has asked the King to fix the matter and is reported as saying, 'Only the King can resolve my case. I want to return to my husband, but if that is not possible I need to know so I can put an end to my life.' Fatima has spent nine months in jail with one of her children and then she moved to an orphanage. Donna Abu-Nasr points out many shortcomings in the country's legal system including shaky rules of evidence, lack of lawyers and judgments based on the whims of judges. Women in Saudi are not permitted to appear before the courts without a male representative.

### And in democratic Australia ...?

Victoria's Chief Commissioner of Police, Christine Nixon has been rejected in a bid to join the all-male Athenaeum Club. (*Herald Sun* 20 January 2008). Had her application been accepted, she would have been the first woman to be accepted into the 140 year old men's club. Ever the philosopher Commissioner Nixon was reported as saying, 'Times are changing and perhaps the Athenaeum might as well.' Victoria's Attorney-General has described the conservative clubs as 'crusty and outdated'. They are currently exempt from membership discrimination because they are not institutions on Crown land.

### The new Joy of Sex

In 1972 the publication of *The Joy of Sex* raised more than eyebrows. An updated *The New Joy of Sex* is due to be published this September with all mod cons including body paint, 'love maps' and sexual hot spots. However Jane Smith, head of marketing and publicity for the publishers Mitchell Beazley, said, '... we wanted to ensure that the book does not lose its roots.'

JOY ROOTS is a feminist lawyer