



Moving forward after COVID-19

MARIA SAVVAS PRESIDENT, LAW SOCIETY NT

This isn't the column I was expecting to be writing for this issue of *Balance*. Instead of spending the last couple of months preparing for law week, I've been adapting to life in isolation in a new digitally driven world and, like some, been completely preoccupied with staying up-to-date with everything COVID-19.

Now, with restrictions easing, as we start to return to a semi-normal way of working and living, I wonder whether the legal profession's working from home experience will lead to any shift in thinking by employers and employees. Will workplaces continue to facilitate remote working arrangements, and if so, are our local practitioners at risk of being overlooked by employers for practitioners outside of the Territory?

The workplace environment has undergone rapid and significant changes since the coronavirus pandemic. Many firms were forced to incur the costs involved to facilitate employees successfully working from home, and if it wasn't fully appreciated before, two things quickly became apparent. Firstly, up-to-date technology in legal practices these days is an absolute necessity and allows us to advance our ability to practice remotely and connect with each other in different ways. Secondly, remote working and flexible working arrangements can result in increased efficiencies and savings. It may be time to farewell the old days of working in the office Monday to Friday from 8 am to 5 pm, although let's be

honest, those hours are a little understated for many practitioners. The pandemic has allowed technology to flex its muscles and has forced us to evolve and revise our thinking on the best way to practice.

I have been meeting regularly with the Presidents of interstate law societies for the past couple of months and have been interested in the measures adopted by law practices across Australia to accommodate their employees' remote working environment. Several firms have adopted flexible working arrangements facilitated by their technological platforms, allowing their employees to work remotely and with different working hours, subject to their needs. The feedback has been positive, with employers already indicating that remote working is likely to remain in place even well after the pandemic. For some firms, flexible working arrangements aren't new, with many practitioners already having these arrangements in place. For others, working from home full-time or part-time is a novel concept, and having now experienced it, I have no doubt that many will be keen to continue with such arrangements. Others may still prefer working from the office or, a combination of both the office and home. I expect that some employers will be far more receptive than others. As the general feedback has been that productivity hasn't been negatively affected I would expect all employers would be prepared to at least discuss all possible workplace arrangements.

The Courts have also been supportive by adopting practices permitting the electronic filing of documents and hearing matters via video or audio link. I, for one, welcomed the introduction of Practice Direction 1 of 2020 for the electronic filing in civil proceedings, and have received positive feedback generally in relation to the ease with which documents can be filed in Courts and processed.

There have been additional flow on effects to the remote working arrangements such as being forced to learn how to go 'paperless', digital innovation and re-designing or reducing office spaces. These are all opportunities for us to improve how we practice and evolve as a profession. That said, I appreciate that remote working arrangements has its limitations for practitioners, namely the loss of social interaction with colleagues and face-to-face meetings with clients which can be problematic.

Regardless of your preferences, this pandemic has offered us to the opportunity to rethink how we work and has allowed us to engage in open discussions about preferable working arrangements.

Before I sign off, I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate our Solicitor- General Sonia Brownhill on her appointment to the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory. Ms Brownhill is well-respected by her colleagues and the NT profession and has a demonstrated passion for the Territory.

As always, I welcome any comments or feedback from members about any issues of importance to members and our local profession. Stay safe. ■

I can be contacted through the Society or via email:

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CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ADVANCING THE LEGAL PROFESSION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

[FREE] CPD program update

To support NT legal practitioners both financially and professionally during COVID-19 restrictions, the Law Society NT will be offering a number of **free** CPD seminars which can be attended by members online* via Zoom.

Members will be notified of future CPDs via email. Keep an eye on *The Practitioner* e-newsletter and social media for updates as they occur.

Registrations essential.

📘 [facebook.com/lawsocietynt](https://www.facebook.com/lawsocietynt)

🐦 twitter.com/lawsocietynt



* If at the time of the CPD occurring and if current COVID-19 restrictions allow, a limited number of seats *may* be available to members to attend in person. Advice relating to this will be included within the CPD event information on Eventbrite when you register your attendance.