

The lawyer will see you now

Solicitors in doctors' surgeries? Why not in petrol stations and funeral parlours, asks **Richard Barr**



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Richard Barr is a consultant solicitor with Scott-Moncrieff & Associates Ltd scomo.com

There was a quiet stillness about the dentist's waiting room. Through the window, Norwich cathedral glowed in the afternoon sunlight. I settled into the plush leather. Shortly afterwards the only other patient arrived: a good omen I thought, as the Bishop of Norwich lowered himself onto the other settee.

Mine is a good dentist, but I felt extra reassurance by the presence of the Bishop: surely, even if not asked, he would arrange for divine intervention to ensure the safe amputation of a wayward tooth.

We both picked up our newspapers and ignored each other. I resisted the temptation to address him:

“‘Ere, in't you that Bishop person mate?”

Then as I read the paper I frowned, and a silent aargh formed on my lips.

I was ushered in, pumped full of anaesthetic, comprehensively warned of the things that might go wrong (memo to dentist: should I change my mind and chose to bring a claim against you, please turn to a relevant volume of *Solicitors Journal* to aid your defence).

Amid the grinding and grating noises I began, still silently, to groan and scream, but the pain was not from what was happening inside my mouth and my dentist heard nothing. With a final effort a tooth that had served me well for several decades was removed. I was disappointed that he did not let me have it to offer to the tooth fairy and claim my pound.

The procedure over, I was able to concentrate on the thing that was causing me so much pain. It all started while the Bishop and I were reading our papers, when my eye caught the report about more government idiocy (no, not Brexit nor Grayling).

Somebody had decided that it was a brilliant idea to station lawyers in doctors' surgeries to help remedy the access to justice desert that is spreading aridly across the country.

I suspect that the mandarins who dreamed up this idea have never visited an average medical centre. If they had, they would have found it overcrowded, over busy and hostile to the presence of lawyers. I once

made the mistake of taking a copy of *Solicitors Journal* with me when I visited my doctor. As luck would have it, the cover announced a feature on medical negligence. The look that I received made me seriously worry that the doctor had every intention of resiling from his Hippocratic oath on that occasion.

If the medical profession object to something as innocuous as *Solicitors Journal* coming through the door, how are they going to enjoy an invasion of lawyers in their midst? Unlikely to welcome us with open arms, I guess. In any event, there must be huge scope for things going wrong. Sick people will inevitably be asking us for medical advice or seeking guidance on leases from their doctors. If introduced it will be necessary to avoid confusion as far as possible.

Stethoscopes will be mandatory for all doctors, and solicitors will have to change the habits of a lifetime and wear wigs.

This hairbrained scheme could surely only work if solicitors were placed in varied settings. Here are a few suggestions.

Service stations. These are the ideal locations for all road traffic cases. Solicitors could set up office in the inspection pits. If a car is driven over the pit, clients would have complete privacy and only a slight risk of sump oil being poured over their heads.

This would enable clients to demonstrate, perhaps with real cars, exactly how their accident occurred (and if things go wrong, they could enhance their claims by adding a little extra whiplash).

Funeral homes. These would be for those who wish to make wills or apply for probates. The synergistic Testament to Tombstone service would work well. Testators could discuss wills, coffins and headstones all under the same roof.

And dentists. This should be the preserve of the more difficult client. Solicitors would have to be given special dispensation to place their obdurate clients in the dentist's chair, recline them and run the noisiest drills for as long as it takes for them to become compliant. However, I expect that the SRA might have some views about actual dentistry performed by solicitors. Bishops might be available too but possibly at an extra cost. 



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