

**CATHERINE HENRY PARTNERS,  
NEWCASTLE**

Catherine Henry Partners (CHP) has established itself as a strong regional practice in the niche areas of health law and relationship law, challenging the perception that the opportunity to specialise does not exist for regional firms.

Formerly known as King Street Lawyers and in operation for more than 50 years, partner Catherine Henry acquired the firm in 2009 and redeveloped what was a plaintiff personal injury firm into a strong medical



negligence practice. CHP now focuses on health law and "relationship law" which encompasses family law, wills and estates, guardianship, aged care and employment. CHP's clients are sourced from all regions throughout NSW and the ACT and much of the firm's work is referred by other firms that seek specialist advice in the health and medical law area.

Henry, who has practised as a health lawyer for over two decades, says after relocating from Sydney to Newcastle for family reasons in 2002, she made a strong strategic decision to establish a regional firm, specialising in health and relationship law.

"I'm committed to doing what I can to break down the perception that you have to practice in the big city to specialise in areas of law outside family law and general personal injury," says the former president of the Newcastle Law Society (2004 – 2009).

"I was very aware of the fact that medical negligence litigation, as a practice area, has been confined to capital city firms, yet I was confident that a strong, viable practice could be sustained in regional NSW. My experience since coming to Newcastle has shown it was a good decision to make."

Henry is passionate about her work, which she shares with partner and specialist family and relationship lawyer Stephen Rugendyke. "On a personal level and after all these years, I still continue to find the interaction of law and medicine fascinating," she says. "I am very fortunate to have such a great team of individuals at CHP. The staff tell me they enjoy being a part of a specialised practice and there is a palpable commitment to and passion for what we do."

Previously a senior solicitor at the NSW Health Care Complaints Commission, Henry has a special interest in women's health, particularly obstetrics and gynaecology, and the legal aspects of reproductive medicine.

The firm has grown significantly since Henry first took over. When she first joined King Street Lawyers in 2004 there was just one full-time solicitor and two part-time secretaries. The firm now has 15 staff, including two partners and five solicitors, and maintains a high number of female lawyers. "The firm has a very high proportion of women lawyers and flexibility of working conditions is embraced and supported by the firm's principals," Henry says.

After experiencing significant growth in the past 18 months, Henry says the firm is now looking to consolidate, but plans are underway to introduce a free monthly legal clinic to operate on a Saturday morning – a first for a Newcastle firm.

**- Briana Everett**