

MONDAY, APRIL 2, 2018

Empathetic Advocacy

Doyle Law's founder finds it personally meaningful to help catastrophically injured clients.

By **Melanie Brisbon**
Daily Journal Staff Writer

BEVERLY HILLS — Helping people with serious injuries is particularly meaningful for Conal Doyle, founder of Doyle Law APC, a Beverly Hills-based boutique firm that specializes in personal injury matters.

“To me, it’s really personal when I take on a case for someone that’s been hurt badly,” Doyle said. “When we get a great result in this business, it usually means that someone has suffered a tragedy. My whole life, I’ve had daily struggles, pain and mobility issues, so I know firsthand what some of these folks go through.”

Doyle was born without his right leg. Many of his clients have also lost limbs. Catastrophic injuries, including amputation, spinal cord and brain injury, are among Doyle Law’s specialty practice areas, along with government liability and insurance bad faith matters.

“If it’s a case where I can make an impact, I’ll take the case,” Doyle said. “That means one of two things: either helping a catastrophically injured person — an amputee, spinal cord injury victim, someone with a brain injury; or by creating systemic change through safer products, better medicine or equal rights for all.”

Charlene McKnight relied on Doyle’s counsel after undergoing complex spine surgery. The neuro monitoring signal, which is designed to monitor spinal cord pressure, was lost during her surgery, according to court documents.

Doyle alleged the technicians overseeing the signal were negligent because they failed to notify the surgeon that it was lost during surgery — and the doctors were unable to prevent paralysis.

The jury awarded Doyle’s client more than \$26 million. *McKnight v. Catholic Healthcare et al.*, S-1500-CV-269628 (Kern Super. Ct., filed Feb. 18, 2010).



Alex Drecun / Special to the Daily Journal

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“We were able to establish that the [Medical Injury Compensation Reform Act] legislation capping noneconomic damages at \$250,000 for medical malpractice cases in California did not apply,” Doyle said. “Companies were hiring uncredentialed, unqualified technicians to monitor spine surgeries.

“From talking to a number of surgeons around the state after the case, surgical centers and hospitals established new criteria for the hiring of technicians to make sure they were properly trained and certified,” he added.

Doyle represented the family of Francisco Castaneda, a Salvadoran who died of penile cancer after government officials refused to allow him to have a biopsy, according to court documents. Castaneda had been detained by the State of California and the United States for a drug conviction and im-

migration law violation. He died in February 2008 after having his penis amputated. The family sued the individual health care workers who, they said, failed to assist Castaneda, an issue that Doyle argued before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court held that plaintiffs are barred from suing individual federal health care workers for constitutional violations arising from their official duties but Doyle was still able to secure a recovery of \$3.2 million from government entities.

“The *Castaneda* case was a catalyst for the reform of the entire U.S. immigration health care detention system,” Doyle said. “They changed their policy on providing medical care to immigrant detainees after that case.”

Attorney Stephen Beke joined Doyle Law in 2015. The Harvard Law School graduate

worked as a screenwriter before becoming an attorney.

“There are some similarities in terms of storytelling in creative and legal writing,” Beke said. “In both, you’re trying to allow a group of people — an audience, a jury — to take on the perspective of someone they know nothing about. How do you tell the story of that character or that client in a way that is going to let people step into that person’s shoes?”

The founding partner started his first law firm, Willoughby Doyle LLP, in 2005. At that time, he faced financial challenges but did several things to overcome them.

“I tried to be really lean and didn’t have a lot of support staff,” Doyle said. “But I had a lot of trial experience and a lot of confidence. I also had a specific marketing plan when I started the firm.”

Doyle gained trial experience years earlier, defending government entities, large companies and hospitals at a law firm in Tampa, Florida. The prior trial experience and his

in-depth knowledge of legal issues related to prosthetics and civil rights issues helped bring cases in.

The Willoughby Doyle partnership dissolved and Doyle Law started soon afterward in 2013, without challenges. Now, a major focus of Doyle Law is litigating insurance bad faith claims against health insurers that deny payment for amputees’ prosthetic limbs.

“I’m on a mission to change the way the insurance industry treats amputees because I’ve discovered that health insurers routinely deny medically necessary prosthetics to try and save some money,” Doyle said. “The sad part about this is that technology has finally given amputees the chance to regain a lot of function. I know that from experience.”

Howard A. Slavin, a partner at Lewis Boisgaard & Smith LLP, litigated a case against Doyle a few years ago.

“I found him to be an extraordinarily gifted lawyer, thoroughly prepared on the most difficult medical subjects and a person who

doesn’t get enough acclaim for the work that he does,” Slavin said.

Kjar, McKenna & Stockalper founding partner James J. Kjar said litigating cases against Doyle is, “a challenge and a pleasure because as formidable as he is as an adversary, he is also a consummate gentleman and a man of his word.”

“He’s an engaging, creative and very resourceful lawyer who can view his cases from many different angles and in ways which few plaintiff attorneys perceive,” Kjar said.

Terrence Jones, now a sole practitioner, was an attorney at the Department of Justice when he met Doyle.

“When I was considering going out on my own, I approached him for advice and now I do what he does,” Jones said. “Having started my career working for DOJ, I was trained to always pursue justice. I think Conal takes that same approach.”