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## **THE MASON INSTITUTE LAUNCH**

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The last issue of *SCRIPTed* included a report on the establishment of the Mason Institute for Medicine, Life Sciences and the Law (MI). Subsequently, MI held its official launch. The event took place on 6th June 2012, in Teviot Row, at the University of Edinburgh.

The Institute has been set up in honour of and to reflect the philosophy of Professor JK Mason and the launch was a perfect platform for reflecting upon his contributions within and beyond academia. The particular focus of the evening was 'The Future of Medical Law and Ethics' which picked up on a theme of a conference (also held at the University of Edinburgh) in 1998. The event brought together a strong panel of experts in the field of Medical Jurisprudence, who have debated with Professor Mason himself on the future of Medical Law and Ethics for some years.

Professor Graeme Laurie, who has worked closely alongside Professor Mason at the School of Law, opened the event with a welcome, summation of Professor Mason's contributions and overview of the aspirations of the Mason Institute. Professor Laurie acted as Chair for the event, contributing to and facilitating some lively and thought-provoking discussions. In particular, he drew upon predictions made by Professor Mason and Alexander McCall Smith in their pioneering textbook 'Law and Medical Ethics', now in its eighth edition.

Next, Professor Mason addressed the audience, providing his reflections on developments within Medical Law and Ethics, particularly since the 1998 conference. He highlighted three particular cases which he felt have lay at the heart of Medical Law and Ethics over the last decades. For example, he discussed the case of *Re B*<sup>1</sup> which exhibited the growth of patient autonomy and its dominance in the practice of medicine, stressing the exercise of personal choice as invalid unless it reflected the impact of those choices on others. The case also flagged up the question of the fundamental difference between refusal of treatment and assisted suicide. Prof Mason suggested that Medical Law and Ethics comes in cycles of interest, arguing that we are currently in the 'euthanasia cycle'; his plea for the future in this area was that it be resolved by logical argument and acceptable compromise.

Professor Sheila McLean (Glasgow University) and Professor Emily Jackson (London School of Economics) then discussed current medical developments and Law & Society's response to them in light of their collective experience of decades of working in the field. Specific discussions focused on end of life decisions, informed consent and the changing landscape of reproductive medicine and how it has been shaped by the internet. Following their talks, the panellists who are all pioneers in the discipline, discussed questions presented from the audience on how we should respond to the developments thrown up by medicine and science in the 21st Century.

The launch brought together a diverse spectrum of guests, including a range of academics from different disciplines, members of the public, policy makers and organisations. In particular, the launch was an opportunity for some of Professor Mason's former colleagues and students to come together in celebration of the vast and valuable contributions which he has made across a wide array of disciplines.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ms B v NHS Hospital Trust*, Re [2002] 2 All ER 449

More information about the Mason Institute including a podcast of this event is available from [www.masoninstitute.org](http://www.masoninstitute.org) or email [mason.institute@ed.ac.uk](mailto:mason.institute@ed.ac.uk) and follow us on twitter [@masonInstitute](https://twitter.com/masonInstitute).