

❖ **President's Introduction**

This is the 60th anniversary year of the founding of the Society.

Tonight we have an interesting topic: drug abuse as a defence in criminal cases. This topic was actually envisaged in the inaugural address of Justice Bonney, the first President of the Medico-Legal Society, in September 1947:

A society such as this, which has for its purpose collaboration between the two great professions of medicine and law, is long overdue in New South Wales. Each profession can improve itself, and render better service, by entering into this friendly intellectual relationship with the other and by an exchange of ideas in matters of common interest and concern. For one thing, we might clarify and crystallize our ideas upon certain public questions, in which our two professions might well be expected to take part and to offer a guiding hand. I have in mind such problems as the obligations of society towards its mentally deficient members, and the problem of the proper understanding and treatment - legally, mentally and psychologically - of crime. There are many others.

It is interesting to note that crime was considered a fit topic for the Society.

I also refer to an address by Justice Michael Kirby in Melbourne in 2001, at the launch of a book called *The Principles of Criminal Law*:

Criminal law is the great centrepiece of any legal system. It must change and adapt with changing attitudes. It must pay regard to new problems, new technology and new social attitudes. In my professional lifetime, Australian criminal law has come from being a post-colonial backwater of the English legal system to a highly developed system of our own.

He noted that criminal cases constituted about a quarter of the applications for special leave to appear before the High Court and that there were 114 such applications in 2000. On the other hand, however, he issues a challenge: What are the crimes we accept today that will not find a place in an edition of a book on criminal law 40 years hence? One of these, he suggests, concerns all drug offences: will they still be referred to as legal problems or will they be seen as problems of public health?