**Successes & Failures in Remote Provision of Legal Advice (Covid-19 and beyond)**

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I attended a session on the success and failure in remote provision of legal advice. This session was very interesting as it highlighted the positives that have come out of this shift to remote work and whether it is a viable option post Covid-19.

Some of the issues of remote hearings that stood out to me are as follows:

* A common problem that clients faced was that they were told that their representatives were not available, when in fact they were not dialled in, which led to the hearing occurring in their absence.
* Another issue is the fact that remote hearings lead to clients going through distressing times alone if the hearing does not go in the way they envisioned. Face to face hearings mean that the representative can help the client understand what has been decided and ensure that they are okay.
* Most of the time clients do not feel as though they will get a fair hearing if it is conducted online which leads to them being postponed. This has caused a backlog for the courts.

There are also some positives to remote hearings. Some clients prefer remote hearings as they may have struggled to attend the hearing in person due to mobility reasons. Pre-Covid if the client did not want to attend a hearing, they would have opted for a paper hearing, meaning they would not be able to give oral evidence. This could be detrimental in the case. Now they are able to do what is comfortable to them. There are also no geographical limitations as they can now attend hearings for people outside of London which would not have happened pre-Covid.

This part of the session was really engaging as it made me analyse whether there will be a future of remote hearings even after the pandemic.

A representative from University House Legal Advice Centre spoke about how they were able to shift quickly as they had previously used technology to conduct remote work. It was interesting to hear about how quickly they were able to adapt to the pandemic. Their clinic work is all online, but this means that they see less people. However, they spend more time on clients, many of whom are vulnerable. He also spoke about how they have created an advice portal that clients can use which is more efficient. Their experience of providing remote advice helped create this. It was fascinating to hear about this portal as there is a possibility that many law firms start adopting this method of giving out advice.

The panel then went on to discuss international pro bono, mainly regarding asylum seekers – an important topic at the moment. They discussed that all lawyers are providing remote advice and working closely with lawyers that are in Greek Islands: Lagos and Samos. They have faced organisational and technical challenges as sometimes technology does not work how it needs to. Another issue they have dealt with is that consultations may be delayed as clients are not able to leave the camp due to coronavirus restrictions. It is also more difficult to express emotional support remotely and difficult to meet those who are vulnerable and unable to meet in person. They then spoke about how they wish to go forward with their work in the future. They suggested that they are looking to continue the hybrid model they have created where some lawyers in work in person on the islands and some work remotely.

Overall, this session was highly engaging and very relevant in the current times. The session highlighted issues with remote hearings that I would not have thought of otherwise. After the session was complete, I found myself in deep thought about what the future of legal advice will be like.