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## **Elder Law and Special Needs Attorneys: What You Should Know**

by Shannon Laymon-Pecoraro, Esq.

As the population of seniors and persons with special needs grows, so does the need for Elder Law and Special Needs Law. While these practice areas are defined by the clientele served, it is important to understand what encompasses Elder Law and Special Needs Law – and that it involves much more than just estate planning. Elder Law and Special Needs Law are a complex maze of numerous fields, and an experienced Elder Law and Special Needs Law attorney will understand how to navigate through such a maze.

Some of the fields of law addressed by an attorney practicing Elder Law and Special Needs Law, as identified by the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA), include, but are not limited to:

- Asset protection planning
- Medicare and Medicaid claims and appeals
- Claims and appeals before the Social Security Administration
- Tax planning
- Planning for disability
- Guardianships and Conservatorships
- Estate planning
- Estate and Trust Administration
- Long-Term Care planning
- Public Benefit planning

When selecting an attorney who practices Elder Law and Special Needs Law, it is important that the attorney understand the interplay of these various fields. For example, when drafting an estate plan, the attorney should be analyzing the effect on a loved one's public benefit eligibility or tax status. By doing so, the attorney not only adds additional value, but also promotes a comprehensive solution to the complex situation faced by the client.

Additionally, an experienced Elder Law and Special Needs Law attorney will usually have a network of non-legal professionals. These other professionals will be able to assist the attorneys and their clients in areas not routinely handled by attorneys. It is not uncommon for an Elder Law and Special Needs Law attorney to utilize

## **Elder Law and Special Needs Attorneys: What You Should Know (cont'd)**

a financial advisor, particularly a certified financial planner, to assist with investment strategies or a geriatric care manager to provide a care assessment and assist with appropriate placement or retention of care services.

Led by Andrew Hook, the first Certified Elder Law Attorney in the Commonwealth of Virginia and a founding member of the Special Needs Alliance, the Hook Law Center, P.C. is a firm that is devoted to meeting the needs of seniors and individuals with special needs. As a result of Mr. Hook's credentials, the attorneys and staff are exposed to numerous advanced and complicated Elder Law and Special Needs Law issues. If you or someone you know could benefit by speaking with one of our attorneys, please contact us to schedule a consultation.



### **Bubonic Plague**

**Hook Law Center:** Kit Kat, what can you tell us about the latest information about the cause of bubonic plague so many centuries ago?

**Kit Kat:** Well, there is some really fascinating research that has just been made public about this. In the past, it was thought that rats were the carriers of this dreaded disease. However, it now appears that the gerbil may have been the real culprit. The old theory was debunked as scientists in Britain realized that the rat population would have to have certain conditions to swell—warm summers with not much precipitation. Since this was not the case, scientists began looking elsewhere. They now think the plague coincided with weather in Asia. "...Europe always experienced plague outbreaks after central Asia had a wet spring followed by a warm summer—terrible conditions for black rats, but ideal for Asia's gerbil population." The gerbils got to Europe through trade between the 2 continents. This also explains why the plague, starting largely in the 14th century, popped up periodically until the 1800s. Rats were present the whole time, but the plague's appearance was sporadic.

Another misconception that should be corrected is that the disease was spread through flea bites. Last year, scientists in looking at plague DNA in 14th-century skeletons realized that the disease was spread through the air. Nils Christian Stenseth, an author of the study which implicated gerbils in causing the disease, says his team will attempt to validate these findings. His team will be looking for genetic variation in ancient skeletons over time, which would strengthen the argument for gerbils as the cause of the disease. 'If we're right, we'll have to rewrite that part of history,' he says. Stay tuned as we learn more.

(Sarah Kaplan, "After 8 centuries, rats exonerated in spread of Black Death. Gerbils implicated." [The Washington Post](#), 2-24-2015)

**Upcoming Events**

- **March 26 and 27, 2015** – The HLC Monthly Seminar Series for **March** is **How to Protect Your Home, Your Assets, & Your Family**. The seminar is scheduled at 10 a.m. on Thursday, March 26, 2015 in HLC's Harbour View office, 5806 Harbour View Blvd, Suffolk, VA OR Friday, March 27, 2015 in HLC's Virginia Beach office, 295 Bendix Road, Virginia Beach, VA. Space is limited!!! To reserve your seat, please call 757-399-7506 and ask for Debbie.
- **September 9, 2015** – Andrew Hook will be speaking at a Virginia Continuing Legal Education seminar.
- **August 12, 2015** – Andrew Hook will be speaking to a group at Maryview Hospital in Portsmouth, Virginia.
- **August 21, 2015** – Andrew Hook will be speaking to a group at DePaul Hospital in Norfolk, Virginia.
- **August 27, 2015** – Andrew Hook will be speaking to a group at Mary Immaculate Hospital in Newport News, Virginia.



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