

Saturday Insight

EMAIL SIGN-OFF SETS A GENDER

Dr Jillian Spencer's insistence on stating that she is an adult human female at the end of her electronic communications has ended up in the QIRC, writes **Des Houghton**



Des Houghton

A disagreement over an email signature is what triggered an extraordinary legal battle between suspended child psychiatrist Jillian Spencer and Queensland Health.

When Dr Spencer added to her email signature in 2022 to include the words "woman – adult human female", medical directors Dr Stephen Stathis and Dr Arun Pillal-Sasidharan said it may be perceived as transphobic and ordered her to remove it.

Court documents show the row over gender identification was the start of four separate actions in the industrial courts that have divided the medical profession – and threaten to split the Crisafulli government.

Dr Spencer wants her suspension

lifted so she can return to work at the Queensland Children's Hospital, documents filed in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission reveal. And she is seeking compensation for alleged breaches of her human rights.

A bundle of letters and emails presented to the QIRC show Dr Pillal-Sasidharan and Dr Stathis were worried about the 'non-standard' pronoun on Spencer's email signature and the "potential messaging this sends". They said it "might cause distress" to staff members at Queensland Children's Hospital.

"Dr Pillal-Sasidharan and Dr Stathis raised with Dr Spencer that they were aware a number of staff, including those in the gender service, have been confused and concerned by her use of the Oxford English Dictionary definition of a woman in her signature block instead of pronouns," the document states.

"Dr Spencer was advised that the wording of her signature block may be perceived by people to be 'transphobic'."

According to the document Dr Spencer was ordered to "amend her email signature block, deleting the words 'Woman – adult female'."

She was also directed to "use a patient's preferred name or pronoun in all written communication in the patient's file and emails, and in verbal communications during clinical meetings across the Children's Hospital and Health Service".

Prior to the removal order, Dr Spencer had frequently challenged the culture inside the Queensland Children's Hospital gender clinic including the extensive use of rainbow flags and staff lanyards which she said led to vulnerable children being encouraged and even praised for being transgender, the QIRC was told.

"Dr Spencer had previously raised in emails her concerns that, within the hospital, there is a concerning ideological culture which is supported by managers and manifests itself in an excessive number of trans-pride flags in staff areas and in mental health staff being encouraged to wear rainbow lanyards, wear pronoun badges and initiate conversations with patients by saying: 'My pronouns are x and y, what are yours?'"

"Dr Spencer expressed the belief that this leads to young people being denied the benefit of a more cautious and neutral approach to exploring their gender concerns, with the risk of young people being encouraged to be, or praised for, identifying as trans.

“It is concerning that an oddly binary approach is adopted in relation to children

Justice Andrew Strum



"It also has the risk of parents feeling pressured to affirm their children's gender transition and suppress any instinct to protect the child from medical harms resulting from ill-advised or premature gender treatments and procedures."

Court documents show Dr Spencer told Dr Pillal-Sasidharan in an email in April 2022 that she had concerns about transgender activism in the children's gender clinic that included LGBTQ+ flags and rainbow signage.

An avalanche of letters and emails tendered in evidence to the QIRC show how the dispute raged behind the scenes between 2022 and 2025.

Queensland Health doctors and bureaucrats accused Dr Spencer of bringing the Queensland health service into "disrepute" by openly criticising the "gender affirmation model".

She hit back saying it was her duty as a child and adolescent psychiatrist to speak up about what she saw were the dangers prescribing puberty blockers and same-sex hormones to children.

Dr Spencer complained her unblemished 20-year record as a psychiatrist was not properly considered as Queensland Health mounted its case to oust her.

Now she is fighting back. Her solicitor John Theodore Steenhof has filed a submission saying she has been discriminated against by Queensland Health.

Mr Steenhof is seeking a restraining order preventing Queensland Health "committing any further contravention of the Anti-Discrimination Act".

Mr Steenhof also seeks damages for Dr Spencer in an amount to be determined by the court, and he

wants Queensland Health to publicly apologise to her for its "discriminatory conduct".

The dispute escalated in January 2023 when Craig Kennedy, a Queensland Health divisional director, gave Dr Spencer a "lawful and reasonable direction" to follow the affirmation model.

"In the event a patient may benefit from referral to the gender service, you are to provide them with information that supports this pathway and not dissuade the patient in any way," he said in a letter before the court.

Mr Kennedy also warned her to comply with the Queensland Public Service Code of Conduct.

In April 2023 Dr Spencer was suspended.

Two months later Dominic Tait, the executive director of clinical services at Children's Health, told Dr Spencer that disciplinary proceedings against her had begun. She was accused of criticising the model of care at the gender clinic and disparaging her colleagues publicly at gender forums in Brisbane and Canberra.

Mr Tait issued her with a show cause notice saying she was liable to an adverse disciplinary finding "on the basis that you have been guilty of misconduct that is inappropriate or improper conduct in a private capacity within the meaning of the Act".

Dr Spencer made three public interest disclosures (PIDs) saying there was no reliable scientific evidence to show the gender affirmation model introduced in 2016 was safe. In fact, it was unsafe, she said. She said she had a professional duty to speak out because there was evidence to show puberty blockers



Dr Stephen Stathis, a psychiatrist who sees children and adolescents and (inset) Dr Michelle Tetfer.
Picture: Jamie Hanson



BACK IN THE SADDLE



Luke Holmes tackles a steer during a previous Mount Isa Rodeo. Picture: Peter Wallis

he said. "But the mood was very positive right from that first meeting.

"What we had was a good group of people who were very passionate about the rodeo and very passionate about the town of Mount Isa."

He said the philosophy to keep the rodeo alive was simple.

"Regardless of what you are doing, you need to make more money than you are spending if you want to be successful," he says.

He pointed to what he said was "a lot of money to bring big entertainers out to the rodeo".

"But were they bringing extra people to the rodeo? Probably not.

"There's only so many people

in Mount Isa and only so much accommodation for visitors."

So big-ticket entertainment was out and repairing relationships with creditors burnt by the previous administration was in. Mr Tully said

the new board was grateful for the support of former creditors who were still owed money but placed their trust in the new operators and grateful for sponsors who either returned or joined from scratch.

"The sponsors and the suppliers need to be congratulated," he said.

The liquidation of the old Mount Isa Rodeo Ltd company remains ongoing but is expected to be finalised later this year.

Two killed in Gaza church strike

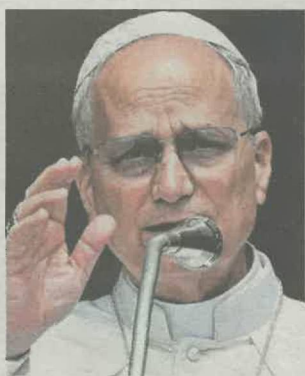
Emily Macdonald
Merryn Johns

Pope Leo XIV said he was "deeply saddened" after Israel's deadly strike on Gaza's only Catholic Church where Christians, Muslims and children with disabilities were sheltering.

Two people were killed in the strike, according to Al-Ahli Hospital spokesman Fadel Naem where the wounded were treated.

The "mistake" came as Gaza's Hamas-run civil defence agency reported that Israeli strikes across the Palestinian territory killed at least 20 people.

"With deep sorrow the Latin Patriarchate can now confirm



Pope Leo XIV

that two persons were killed as a result of an apparent strike by the Israeli army that hit the Holy Family Compound this morning," it said in a statement. "We pray for the rest of

their souls and for the end of this barbaric war. Nothing can justify the targeting of innocent civilians."

Gaza civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal said "two citizens from the Christian community" were killed in an Israeli strike on the church in Gaza City, with which the late Pope Francis kept regular contact through the war.

"Israel deeply regrets that a stray ammunition hit Gaza's Holy Family Church. Every innocent life lost is a tragedy", Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, adding that an investigation was under way and Israel was "committed to protecting civilians and holy sites".

Brisbane's flight paths may be changing

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WE WANT OUR PETER HOME

The death of their son's killer has brought some solace for Joan and Luciano Falconio ... but the pain still lingers. P66



KYLIE LANG

As the thin blue line gets thinner, and more police become babysitters, a retired cop says officers should be allowed to get back to the job they originally signed up for. P68



Dr Jillian Spencer has taken her case to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission.

“
Dr Spencer had previously raised her concerns that, within the hospital, there is a concerning ideological culture which ... manifests itself in an excessive number of trans-pride flags in staff areas

Letter to the QIRC

and sex change hormones caused infertility, lack of sexual function and long-term physical health consequences and there was the risk of “detransition” or regret. Her PIDs were formally rejected by Queensland Health which argued the gender affirming model did not pose serious or substantial harm.

Dr Spencer is now challenging that decision and seeks to have her PIDs sanctioned by the QIRC to gain official whistleblower status and legal protections that go with it.

In her second whistleblower case before the QIRC Dr Spencer alleges the children's health service provided false information about the benefits of gender affirming care.

The third whistleblower case concerns online discussions about the gender service approvals for double mastectomies for up to 35 adolescent girls who wanted to change sex. Dr Spencer questions the procedures around patient consent.

In a separate matter, Dr Spencer alleges her human rights were breached. She believes she was discriminated against for her political belief that people cannot change sex. That case is also challenging the hospital's right to impose a model of health care upon clinicians against their conscience.

In a submission to the commission Mr Steenhof said government policy should “focus on the child's best interests” rather than directing a child “down a predetermined treatment pathway”.

It was Dr Spencer's political belief that “government policy should not

preclude practitioners from exercising the clinical freedom to take an individualistic approach to a child's mental health”.

He said Dr Spencer's rights to freedom of conscience and belief that are protected in the Human Rights Act were infringed.

Mr Steenhof went further saying the discriminatory conduct limited Dr Spencer's capacity to exercise reasonable professional judgment in providing psychiatric care.

Dr Spencer's legal team will call national and international experts as witnesses to explain the harms, risks and consequences to children from gender affirming interventions. Dr Spencer wants the hearings live-streamed to allow greater public scrutiny.

Her legal team is buoyed by a decision in the Family Court where Judge Andrew Strum criticised the gender-affirming care treatment guidelines used throughout Australia. Justice Strum was especially critical of Professor Michelle Telfer, described as Australia's foremost gender-medicine expert and the lead author of the guidelines.

Justice Strum found Telfer gave misleading evidence in support of a mother who wanted her child to be prescribed puberty blockers.

His judgement in June this year has called into question the integrity of treatment of gender-dysphoric children.

The Australian Standards of Care and Treatment Guidelines for Trans and Gender Diverse Children and Adolescents written by Dr Telfer and

her colleagues in Melbourne are used in Queensland and other states.

Justice Strum stripped the mother of custody and effectively blocked the 12-year-old from accessing treatment. He criticised the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne for failing to give the child a formal gender dysphoria diagnosis until the court proceedings had commenced, despite having treated the child for six years.

Justice Strum also questioned the guidelines for not recognising children may not be capable of making life-altering medical decisions about their gender identity.

“It is concerning that an oddly binary approach is adopted in relation to children, especially of the age of the child the subject of these proceedings; that is, to affirm unreservedly those who present with concerns regarding their gender, brooking no questioning thereof,” he wrote in the judgment.

“The case of the mother ... is that because the child says so, the child is, and must unquestioningly be affirmed as being, female in gender identity. However, that overlooks the obvious, namely, that the child is still a child and not even, if it matters, a teenager.”

Justice Strum also criticised the political advocacy of gender

clinic doctors and said the standards of care rules were written by transgender advocates.

And he believed parents had been “coerced” into giving assent to puberty blockers.

In Queensland, transgender medicine was championed by the Palaszczuk government in 2016. The

then Health Minister Shannon Fentiman told Parliament: “I want to be clear that I define a woman as someone who identifies as a woman and that the Queensland government defines a woman as someone who identifies as a woman.”

“Queensland Health is dedicated to supporting trans and gender-diverse Queenslanders.”

The Spencer case, meanwhile, threatens to become a damaging political problem for the Crisafulli government.

Health Minister Tim Nicholls has persistently refused calls for Dr Spencer to be reinstated despite mounting evidence that her scepticism of the gender-affirming approach is valid. The Red Union Hub has called for Mr Nicholls to step aside. Mr Nicholls is also at odds with several of his Cabinet

colleagues who believe Dr Spencer should be reinstated.

LNP branches in Brisbane, Toowoomba, and the Sunshine Coast have signalled they want Dr Spencer reinstated and the gender clinic shut permanently.

The tone was set in Caloundra at the recent LNP annual general meeting where President Lawrence Springborg was warned by party elder Graeme Haycroft that the party's rank and file were threatening a revolt.



State Health Minister Tim Nicholls

Anthony Albanese has slapped down critics who have chided him for being too weak in defending Australia's interests during his meeting with President Xi Jinping. But the PM says it's all about looking to the future, not the past

ALBO'S TIP-TOE DIPLOMACY

Queensland Legislative Assembly

Number: 5825T111

30 OCT 2025

MP: Mr Knuth

Clerk's Signature: [Signature]

Tabled ☒ By Leave ☐

Anthony Albanese and fiancée Jodie Haydon at the Great Wall of China. Picture: AAP



Clare Armstrong

During the last stop on the final day of his China visit, Anthony Albanese is ushered into a room at the Cochlear factory he has been touring to witness a young hearing impaired boy have his implant activated for the first time.

The private moment – free from cameras – is an emotional one for the Prime Minister, who had only hours earlier spoken passionately about the impact of the famous Australian invention that has already granted hearing to more than 55,000 Chinese people.

"It will be an incredibly proud moment for me ... to witness that," he says.

The Cochlear tour, like many of the PM's business-related stops in China over the past week did not make the top of the 6pm news bulletin or newspaper front page – but it was one of many moments during the trip where Labor's carefully calibrated diplomacy with Beijing is destined to deliver economic benefits to Australia.

As a business seeking to operate in the highly regulated markets of China, having the backing of your government is viewed extremely favourably.

The PM sitting down with Australia's biggest iron ore mine operators, banks, universities, sporting institutions and tourism bodies and their Chinese customers and counterparts will deliver untold economic benefits in the future.

But as pictures of Mr Albanese and fiancée Jodie Haydon walking the Great Wall of China in Beijing or visiting pandas in Chengdu beamed back to Australia, the PM came under fire back home for his weeklong trip – two travel days and a five-day official program – being "indulgent".

The parallels with the past visits of



former prime ministers Gough Whitlam and Bob Hawke also gives Mr Albanese's trip the whiff of a Labor pilgrimage that only adds to the perception he overdid it.

The PM points out his three-city tour is also a mirror of Chinese Premier Li Qiang's own visit to Canberra, Adelaide and Perth last year – a mark of "respect" that on the face of it doesn't "cost" anything.

The issue for Mr Albanese is that not so long ago more than \$20bn worth of Australian goods were locked out of China after Beijing put Canberra in the deepfreeze over a shopping list of so-called "grievances".

Australia has not yet forgotten the harsh economic consequences of China's unilateral actions blocking the trade of key exports like barley, beef and wine, but Mr Albanese is ready to move on.

"What we discuss is moving forward, is issues of today and tomorrow, rather than the past," Mr Albanese told reporters when asked if

he got the sense China's leadership took any responsibility for the breakdown in trade relations with Australia.

It's very clear from the statements made by Mr Xi and Mr Li that in Beijing's fanciful view, it is as if the trade blocks had simply fallen out of the sky one day and "both" Australia and China had then worked together to remove them.

At a CEO roundtable held in the grand Great Hall of the People, Mr Li even joked that Chinese people were so happy to have access to Australian lobsters again they'd likely eat the delicacy out of existence with their enthusiasm.

He conveniently forgot to mention he was a member of the government that barred their citizens' access to the seafood – at great expense and heartache to Australian producers.

Even as the Albanese government has negotiated the easing of those trade blocks, the security situation in the region has deteriorated.

Dangerous incidents like China's