

Inquest after liposuction woman dies

Sue Hewitt
in Melbourne

A CORONIAL inquest will be held into the tragic death of a young woman following a liposuction procedure.

Lauren James, a beautiful 26-year-old Melbourne property valuer, died on Monday.

She was treated at a cosmetic surgery centre in suburban North Caulfield three days earlier. It is understood she complained of bleeding and pain over the weekend and that her partner made many calls to the centre's medical director.

Her family have pledged to back a call for tougher regulation of the vanity surgery industry if a link is found between the liposuction and Ms James' death.

The tragedy is believed to be the first death related to liposuction in Australia in more than 20 years.

Yesterday, Ms James' grief-stricken family paid tribute to her selflessness and inner beauty.

"She was extraordinarily beautiful, both inside and outside," her brother, Collie James Jr, said yesterday.

"Lauren cared more for others than for her self. If there is a connection found between the treatment and her death, it would be in honour of her and her great capacity for love that we would want to make sure this did not happen to anyone else." Ms James had lipo-



TRAGIC: Lauren James died three days after surgery

suction on both thighs and her buttocks at the Centre of Cosmetic and Plastic Surgery on January 19 and was discharged that day.

It is understood she complained of bleeding and pain over the weekend and that her partner, Simon Dal Zotto, made numerous calls to the centre's medical director, Dr Mervyn Cass.

It is believed she saw Dr Cass on Monday morning and died about 8pm.

The tragedy has sparked calls for regulation of Australia's vanity surgery industry.

General practitioners

can perform cosmetic procedures without surgical qualifications.

Ms James lived with Mr Dal Zotto in her family's Kew home.

The blonde-haired beauty with hazel eyes moved to Melbourne from the US with her airline pilot father and her mother, a retired teacher, in June, 1990, three months after her 10th birthday.

Mr James said the family was waiting for the autopsy results to establish the cause of death.

Collie James Jr said his parents, Collie Sr and Katherine James, were too distraught at the tragedy to comment.

"But we would fully endorse an investigation into the dangers and complications that can arise from what is seen as routine cosmetic surgery," he said.

"If it turns out that it was the surgery that caused Lauren's death

courage people to explore all avenues of information about the risks and issues involved in any surgical procedure. We are not prepared emotionally or armed with information at present, but if we knew something more, we would be happy to assist in any investigation."

Australian Medical Association national head Dr Mukesh Haikerwal said there were "no standards" in cosmetic surgery.

He said doctors who were not qualified surgeons could perform cosmetic surgery.

The Australasian College of Cosmetic Surgery was trying to introduce new rules to ensure that cosmetic surgery was carried out by doctors with post-graduate training, Dr Haikerwal said.

Dr Norm Olbourne, a spokesman for the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons, said regulation was needed.

He said doctors should be forced to reveal their qualifications to patients and have a "gold standard" or surgical qualification.

Doctors performing cosmetic surgery should be members of the Fellowship of Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and not rely on "Mickey Mouse" qualifications.

He believed that there had been several deaths following liposuction in Australia in the 1980s.

Dr Tam Dieu, who performed the liposuction on Ms James, was a qualified surgeon. Yesterday, he declined to comment.

Dr Cass said the staff at the centre were "totally shattered".

"Lauren was a gorgeous girl," he said.

"What happened is he-