

# 3 baby deaths,

## Mothers accuse doctor

SUE HEWITT and STEPHEN DRILL

A DOCTOR is operating in Victorian hospitals despite facing claims of negligence over three babies' deaths and three seriously injured babies, as well as 10 complaints over allegedly botched gynaecological procedures.

Claude Calandra is at the centre of 16 allegations of negligence, including a recent secret \$100,000 hospital payout over a stillbirth.

In 11 other cases – some that public hospitals employing Dr Calandra used taxpayer funds to settle – the alleged victims have been gagged.

Lawyers are investigating four more cases of alleged negligence involving the obstetrician and gynaecologist.

The revelations sparked calls for an inquiry into Dr Calandra and the doctor monitoring system.

On Friday, Dr Calandra said: "If you don't want complications, don't undergo surgery."

He vigorously denied he was negligent and blamed insurance lawyers for settling 12 court cases in the past decade. He said lawyers settled out of court because it was cheaper.

Dr Calandra, who runs two consulting rooms and works at the Sunshine and Werribee Mercy hospitals, said he had a "massive practice".

He said he delivered more than 450 babies a year and had performed more than 15,000 laparoscopy – gynaecological – procedures since 1992.

Dr Calandra, a fellow of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said his rate of complications was lower than average.

### MY TOMMI DIDN'T CRY

TRACY Danskin-Anthony never heard daughter Tommi cry.

Moments after delivery, her baby was laid on her chest, but she was worried because the newborn looked purple and was not crying.

Her doctor, Claude Calandra, allegedly put the baby in a cot.

"I just kept praying for her to cry. She never did," she said.

She claimed Dr Calandra called for other doctors and a team worked on the baby, but allegedly could not insert a breathing tube. The baby was taken to another hospital.

"When my baby was four days old we had to turn her (life support) machine off," Mrs Danskin-Anthony said.

"She died in our arms."

She said her baby's heartbeat was dropping during labour, but alleged Dr Calandra "did nothing".

She claimed Dr Calandra gave her pethidine 90 minutes before the birth and that it affected her baby's ability to breathe. Dr Calandra vehemently denied the claim and said he could not prevent the baby's death.



Health concerns: Candice Weir with son Luca.

### FEARS FOR LUCA'S FUTURE

CANDICE Weir fears her baby has suffered developmental problems after being born without a heartbeat.

She said she was a fortnight overdue when her labour was induced, but did not progress on September 30 last year.

"I have had three children so I knew something was wrong," she said. "I was demanding a caesarean, I'd been saying it for four days."

She alleged her son Luca's heartbeat had been dropping during the three days before his birth on October 3.

The baby had to be revived after birth and she feared he might suffer developmental problems, she said.

Dr Calandra was called in for the caesarean and Mrs Weir claimed he treated her with contempt.

She claimed the doctor swore at her and treated her roughly.

"I felt violated and degraded," Mrs Weir said.

She claimed that she also had a severe infection after the birth, which was not treated for about a fortnight.



Never cried: Tracy Danskin-Anthony with a photo of her daughter, Tommi. Pictures: ANDREW BROWNBILL

# 13 complaints

And he said his practice passed an independent assessment in about 2005, requested by his insurance company after a spate of litigation.

But women who allegedly suffered at the hands of Dr Calandra called on the State Government to investigate. The women claimed the complaints system was secretive and did not allow anyone to track a doctor facing multiple complaints.

Tracy Danskin-Anthony, whose daughter died shortly after she was delivered by Dr Calandra, said the system must look at the "big picture". She said her complaint to the Medical Practitioner's Board was dismissed, but should be part of a wider review.

"We are aware of 16 allegations of medical negligence that must be considered, not just mine," she said.

"The Medical Practitioners' Board is bound by outdated laws that prevent it from naming anyone except for the worst offenders and that means no one can join up the dots and follow a repeat offender because they are not, on a case-by-case basis, seen as a serious problem."

Candice Weir, whose son had to be revived after Dr Calandra delivered him in October, said no information was available unless a doctor had been found guilty.

Of 602 complaints made to the board last year about Victorian doctors, 398 were investigated, but only 12 had a formal hearing.

Several of the 16 cases identified by the *Sunday Herald Sun* involving Dr Calandra from 1995 went to the board, but none resulted in sanctions.

Some of the 12 women who settled cases out of court said they wanted all cases reviewed after they became aware of the number of complaints.

Anne Shortall, of law firm Arnold Thomas and Becker, who won a \$100,000 payout for a woman who had a stillborn child, said more needed to be done to investigate doctors who had multiple complaints against them.

A board spokeswoman said the medical board could not comment on Dr Calandra and could not to reveal doctors under investigation.

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## SURGERY PATIENTS

UNAUTHORIZED CARS WILL BE TOWED AWAY AT



Accusations: Dr Claude Calandra denies he is negligent.

Picture: JON HARGEST