

THE BATTLE FOR PI: CAPITAL, CONSOLIDATION AND A MARKET IN FLUX



PERSONAL INJURY AND CLINICAL NEGLIGENCE FIRMS ARE NO LONGER COMPETING ON CASE VOLUMES. THEY ARE COMPETING ON STRATEGY, CAPITAL AND CLARITY OF DIRECTION. THOSE WHO WAIT FOR THE MARKET TO SETTLE MAY FIND IT HAS ALREADY MOVED ON. JEFF ZINDANI REPORTS.

The UK personal injury and clinical negligence sector is undergoing the most significant structural transformation in a generation. Falling claim volumes, the extension of fixed recoverable costs (FRCs), digital disruption and the rapid rise of private capital are reshaping not just who wins work, but how firms position themselves for long-term survival.

This is not simply a story of large firms getting larger. It is a story of a market being reordered around scale at one end and specialism at the other, with a growing premium on operational discipline, technological capability and strategic focus. For firms willing to adapt, particularly well-run boutiques operating in complex, high-value work, this period of upheaval also presents real opportunity.

Market reshaping: structural decline and rising operational demands

Claim volumes across PI and clinical negligence have fallen sharply over the last decade. CRU registrations are now less than half the level recorded ten years ago. Fewer cases now progress beyond the initial screening stage, many settle pre-issue, and a growing proportion no longer justify the economics of advancing to litigation.

The headline growth in total market value to £4.39bn in 2024 masks a more uncomfortable reality. That modest uplift reflects longer case duration and increasing complexity, not an increase in the supply of work. For many firms, revenues are flat or declining, while overheads continue to rise.

Against a backdrop of declining volumes, complex PI and clinical negligence remain one of the sector's few consistently resilient bright spots. Higher value claims, deeper technical expertise and more defensible margins make these areas particularly attractive to acquisitive firms and investor-backed platforms.

Key market changes

Several clear trends now define the PI and clinical negligence landscape.

While the market grew by a modest 2.3%, CRU registrations fell again to 447,973, marking the sixth consecutive annual decline. The top-20 PI firms now handle more than half of all represented claims, underlining the speed of consolidation.

Growth is strongest in clinical negligence, serious injury, public liability and other complex case categories. Larger firms with capital and digital infrastructure are significantly outperforming smaller practices. Investment in workflow automation, digital onboarding and client-facing technology is widening the performance gap between scaled platforms and traditional firms.

Consolidation is no longer a background trend. It is now the defining structural force in PI and clinical negligence

Smaller PI firms face mounting pressure from limited funding for technology, marketing and operational change. This is accelerating consolidation, alongside a growing number of quiet department closures, off-market caseload disposals and confidential succession-led exits.

External investor interest, including private equity, continues to grow as scaled PI platforms become increasingly attractive acquisition targets.

Consolidation: the new order

Consolidation is no longer a background trend. It is now the defining structural force in PI and clinical negligence.

The rise of well-resourced, private equity-backed PI platforms has changed both the scale and tempo of market activity. Firms such as Fletchers Group and Express Solicitors now operate as national platforms with capital, brand strength and digital infrastructure that enable them to acquire caseloads, specialist teams and entire firms at pace.

Since the start of 2025 alone, we have seen Fletchers acquire Scott Rees & Co, purchase the clinical negligence business of Sheldon Davidson Solicitors, and take on Shoosmiths' serious injury practice. Express Solicitors has completed multiple regional acquisitions, while Ufenau Capital Partners has taken a majority stake in Express itself. Alongside these headline deals, a steady flow of mergers, team lifts and boutique acquisitions continues across the country.

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The new economics of PI and clinical negligence

The economics of running a PI or clinical negligence practice have changed fundamentally, but they are not changing in only one direction.

Large firms and investor-backed platforms are investing heavily in automation, digital screening, workflow technologies and AI-assisted evidence handling. These tools are already transforming operational efficiency, reducing cost per case and enabling much more aggressive scaling strategies.

However, this technology gap is not fixed. Gen AI tools and advanced workflow platforms are still relatively expensive in both time and cost for most firms in the sector, but those barriers are coming down quickly. We are already seeing a new generation of med-legal technology platforms emerging that are purpose-built for PI and clinical negligence practices, with pricing, integration and implementation models designed to sit within the reach of well-run boutique firms.

Private equity: promise and peril

From an investor perspective, scaled PI platforms offer attractive characteristics: recurring workflows, predictable long-term revenues, opportunities for operational leverage and significant scope for buy-and-build strategies.

However, the structural risks of the sector remain real. Volatile work in progress, long case cycles, high debt levels and regulatory exposure continue to make PI a challenging investment environment. The collapse of Roberts Jackson in 2019 remains a stark reminder that growth without sufficient financial discipline can be fatal.

There is also a growing possibility of a future 'clash of the titans' as multiple large, PE-backed PI platforms expand in parallel. As the market continues to consolidate, competitive tension between rival national platforms is likely to intensify, particularly in high-value clinical negligence and serious injury work. This could drive further acquisition premiums, rising marketing costs and pressure on margins, testing both strategic discipline and investor patience.

For law firm owners, private equity offers both opportunity and complexity. It can provide the capital needed to modernise systems, expand geographically and acquire competitors. But it also introduces new governance structures, exit timelines and commercial pressures that are not always a natural fit for traditional partnerships.

The market splits in two

What is emerging is a market increasingly divided into two distinct camps.

The first consists of private equity-backed national platforms: capital-rich, operationally sophisticated and highly acquisitive. These firms are building scale rapidly and reshaping client expectations around speed, transparency and digital access.

The second consists of high-value boutique specialists. These firms focus on complex, high-margin work, often driven by referral networks, deep expertise and strong personal reputations. Despite their smaller size, they remain highly attractive acquisition targets precisely because of their margins and specialist capability.

What comes next

We expect continued consolidation, with further private equity entry and an increasing number of platform-led acquisitions. Caseload disposals and departmental closures are likely to rise as firms rationalise underperforming practice areas.

Succession-led exits will become more common as ageing partners confront the reality that organic growth is no longer a viable retirement strategy. At the same time, competition for high-quality boutique specialists will intensify as platforms look to deepen their complex case capabilities.

This is not a story of terminal decline, but of a market being reorganised around different strengths and routes to success

The future will favour the prepared

The PI and clinical negligence sector is not merely evolving. Its foundations are being fundamentally reshaped.

Scale, capital and technology are now powerful competitive advantages, but they are not the only ones. Specialist expertise, strong referral relationships and reputational capital remain formidable assets, particularly for high-quality boutique firms operating at the complex end of the market. This is therefore not a story of terminal decline, but of a market being reorganised around different strengths and different routes to success.

For many firms, the challenge is no longer tactical. It is strategic. Firms must make conscious decisions about their future position: whether to invest, specialise, partner, merge or exit. For well-run boutiques with a clear niche, this period of disruption also presents opportunity. Demand for specialist capability is rising, and both clients and acquirers continue to value depth of expertise over sheer size.

Hesitation still carries risk, but so does unnecessary scale. Those who act early, with clarity of purpose, will retain choice and leverage. Those who define their position clearly, whether as a scaled platform or a focused specialist, can shape their own future rather than having it shaped for them.

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APIL's 2026 Industry Report, published soon, will examine the key issues facing the PI market with contributions from Jeff Zindani and other leading market experts. Available to APIL members