

Select Committee on Stillbirth Research and Education
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to the Select Committee on Stillbirth Research and Education

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Phillip John Youngman and I am the father of Gavin Ryan Youngman and the father-in-law of . The child they lost, Layla Emerald Youngman was and is my grand-daughter.

Layla was my third grandchild and I, like most people, had no concept of the frequency of still-birth in Australia, let alone around the world. If someone had asked me in what country in the world are there 2200 still born babies every year I would have guessed a third-world country, but never in my wildest dreams would I have picked Australia.

I went with Gillian to one of her checkups and saw the image of my grand-daughter's face via the ultra-sound. It was a magical experience and one I will never forget. We were very excited about her pending birth and kept in contact with my son and daughter-in-law on a daily basis. The night Layla was still born Gavin rang his Mum and she answered the phone expecting to be told that we should come and meet our grand-daughter. But Gavin just said, "She's gone Mum."

My wife, Marilyn, said "What do you mean?"

Gavin said "She's not breathing, she's gone."

We were shocked but drove to the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital to be with the grieving parents and Gillian's father, mother and step-father. We were all in shock and then we were told that Gillian was too far advanced and she would have to birth the baby as it was too late for a caesarean birth.

We consoled each other as we waited for the next 20 odd hours until Gillian gave birth to our still born grand-daughter. The thought just kept repeating in my mind, "But she was alive yesterday. How can she be dead a day later?"

I can't imagine the anguish Gavin and Gill must have felt. We went into the room with them and Layla and looked at her little body. She seemed so perfectly formed, she had incredibly long fingers. I remember thinking she could have been a piano player with those hands.

She seemed very long to me, she was just under two feet long. Members of the family wrapped her and passed her from one grandparent to the other so we could hold her in our arms.

I remember looking at her and thinking she just looks like she is asleep. I thought that if I held her and willed it hard enough she might take a big deep breath and open her eyes and look at me and everything would be alright. But it didn't happen; she slept on in her eternal sleep.

Our immediate and extended families were devastated. Everybody came together to support each other and share our love and concern for each other. But none of us could feel the pain Gavin and Gill were feeling. It broke our hearts to see them so shattered.

What I can't understand is that in a country such as ours, one which people in other countries envy, can we not have any government interest in finding out what is killing over 2000 of our children every year. If we were losing over 2000 babies a year to any other illness there would be public outrage. Politicians would be told to fix the problem or look for another job.

But not only is there no government backed research, the government isn't even telling the general public about the situation and what things mothers and fathers can do to reduce the possibility of having to go through the anguish of losing a child.

I'm sure there are people out here in the corporate and private sector whose lives have been impacted by still birth who would be happy to share in the cost of such research. The government only has to put the word out, to ask for their help.

We are a modern country with some of the best minds in the world in medical care and research, yet we sit on our collective hands and do nothing to address a situation that should not be tolerated. We can defeat polio and other problems, but can't beat this problem.

Maybe it's because we aren't sure of the cause/s. Well we faced similar problems to that with other diseases and we managed to figure it out. So why aren't we doing something about this problem.

There are subjects that people don't like to talk about. Taboo subjects like suicide, cancer, domestic violence, racial hatred, etc. People just wish they didn't have to deal with them or they didn't exist, but they do exist and not talking about them doesn't solve them. In our own case there were other people expecting children about the same time as we lost Layla and we were told that the subject would not be discussed near the pregnant women because they didn't want them upset. But that is the very time when the subject of still births should have been discussed.

When a pregnancy is confirmed, the woman should be told of the possibility of a still birth and they should be told of the misinformation that is out there about babies not moving and how to sleep to reduce the possibility of a still birth. The lack of information could be one of the major causes as to why the incidence of still birth is not being reduced.

This is an issue that cannot be ignored any longer by the Australian Government. Funding needs to be provided to identify the causation factors and to educate certainly pregnant women and their partners as to the possible causes and preventative measures that can be used to try and prevent such terrible losses.

Who knows if the children we save could end up being future scientists, doctors, researchers or other important people in the world. Whatever, they become, they have the right to live and be whatever God decides they should be. Not be lost to our world because the government put the cause of their illness in the too hard basket.

Should you wish to discuss any of these issues, you should contact me at my home address or by email at

Yours sincerely

Phillip Youngman