

13 March 2009.

Adrian Smyth

Dear Senators,

On the issue of mens health I believe there is a widespread trend amongst most western cultures which places particular focus on womens health issues compared to men. One example of that culture which dates back more than a hundred years was the sinking of the Titanic: There were not enough lifeboats, the captain gave the order: "Women and children first". It is my belief that order was given by members of a community which placed a higher level of importance on the safety and well being of women compared to men. It is my belief the culture which existed on that fateful evening is still widely reflected today in Australian Government and society.

As a man it is a culture which I embrace to my own detriment. It feels inherently wrong for me to advocate the prospect of placing mens health issues at a higher level of importance compared to women. To do so seems to lack care and consideration for the other gender.

There are a number of health issues which have different affects for women compared to men, for example, different levels of smoking, levels of diet and exercise, diseases which affect one gender and not the other. The cause of the difference in life expectancy, is medical, cultural, and reflects the different pressures which one gender experiences compared to the other.

The complexity of the issue is exemplified in issues such as the different levels of community concern for some cancers compared to others. The different appeal some cancers have to public sentiment, compared to others and the apparent increased incidence dependent upon individual lifestyle choices. For example cervical cancer, breast cancer, testicular cancer, prostate cancer, lung cancer and bowel cancer. Who amongst us would presume to determine which cancers are of greater importance amongst all those.....Not I.

It is my understanding that Australian mens life expectancy is 4.8 years less than Australian womens. The difference has remained significant for some time. Men can on average expect nearly five years less life expectancy, clearly something must be done.

I believe the role of Government on the issue of mens health should be to try to guide the community on resolving its health issues, with an awareness that men have a disadvantage in the lower level of importance placed on their health and well being, by themselves, the community and the Government.

The example I would like to use is suicide. Suicide rates are approximately three times as high for men compared to women. I believe the role of government should be to raise the profile of suicide, to try to reduce rates for both men and women, in the knowledge if all suicide rates are reduced, there

is a benefit to the community, and it will go some way to tackling the imbalance of a lower life expectancy for men compared to women.

It is my belief the role of Government should be to raise awareness and assist the community in tackling its health issues, without trying to exclude one gender compared to the other, but with the knowledge that men have a lower life expectancy and cultural disadvantage on health issues compared to women.

Adrian Smyth