

Tony Ranieri

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee
Suite S1 59
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into services and treatment options for patients with cancer by the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee.

Dear Secretary,

I am grateful for this inquiry and the opportunity to have a voice.

My journey began in August of 1998 when at the age of 36, I was diagnosed with “non-hodgkins lymphoma”. At the time I was given an 80% chance of beating the disease so I took the plunge into the world of chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Given the generous odds, I was not that interested in persuing other options however a family friend convinced me to look into alternative therapy as a way of complementing the conventional treatment. I am forever grateful for that advice.

My first round of treatment was completed around March 1999. Approximately 2 months later my disease returned and this pattern continued for the next 18 months until I finally ran out of options. Throughout this time I was having alternative therapy designed to keep me strong throughout the tough cancer regime. Amazingly it worked wonders. I had an amazing resilience to the treatment which I attribute entirely to the alternative therapy.

In April 2000, I had reached that point we all dread. My medical consultants were speaking of bleeding edge procedures with a high risk of death. I was not ready to undertake this path and instead opted to seek out Dr Qi Chen, a Chinese oncologist practicing Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). I have not looked back since. I just wish I had met this man prior to undertaking all the damaging chemo and radiotherapy.

Dr Chen is an amazing man. Where my conventional doctors were at the end of the road, Dr Chen gave me hope. He suggested that a treatment of acupuncture, herbs, a new diet and lifestyle could help build my immune system to fight the cancer. I undertook a very strict regime and it is now 4 years since my last conventional treatment. My disease has disappeared solely with Dr Chen's help and I am now in my second year of full remission with no signs of disease. I still follow the regime and have developed a new lifestyle which I believe will keep me in good health for years to come. I visit Dr Chen regularly for ongoing monitoring and the provision of herbs.

My medical specialist is amazed and confused, not able to acknowledge the impact Dr Chen has made. I am one of many of Dr Chen's success stories and it frustrates me to think that many more people could be helped if alternative options were made available to the masses. There is a real need for a coordinated approach to managing cancer treatment and alternative care should be a fundamental option. This would need to be done at a level where there is no discrimination towards people wanting to try something other than conventional cancer treatments.

I truly believe that as good as modern medicine has become, the medical fraternity still tend to show a high level of ignorance and arrogance toward other treatment options. I often think of how well off we could all be if both sides came together for the good of all.

I also think the government needs to acknowledge alternative medicine. My treatment has been very expensive and there is very little assistance from health funds or government to alleviate some of the financial pressure. Conventional medicine costs far more than alternative medicine and the long term success rates are probably similar yet governments do not hesitate to pour money into pharmaceutical company bottom lines. In a democratic country like Australia, our choices are truly limited and this inequity should be resolved.

The saddest thing for all is that the good work that Dr Chen and his colleagues perform will probably not be passed on to future generations. We need look no further than the high profile Dr Holt from Perth to discover that his work and methods will be lost to all as soon as he retires. If only all alternative practitioners were given the same exposure. Let's get serious about cancer treatment and think outside the box!

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.

Yours Sincerely

Tony Ranieri
Tuesday, May 17, 2005