

17 Gungurru Road
Armidale NSW 2350

13th March 2005

Senator the Hon Peter Cook
Senator for Western Australia
Australian Labour Party
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Cook

Cancer Inquiry

In May 1992 my wife Helen was diagnosed with bladder cancer. After an 11-hour operation at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, in which her entire bladder and other bits and pieces were removed and replaced with an ileostomy device, her prognosis was extremely poor. As soon as the operation was over the surgeon told me her case was virtually hopeless and he gave her possibly 3 to 6 weeks to live. The tumour was the size of a grapefruit and attached to her backbone, liver, kidneys and reproductive organs.

Following the operation she underwent extensive chemotherapy and radiotherapy for about six months. During this time she was extremely sick and required constant assistance for the next two years.

As soon as she was able to travel we both attended The Gawler Foundation in the Yarra Valley east of Melbourne to take part in one of Ian Gawler's 10-day courses that examined how cancer sufferers could better cope with the trauma of the disease and hopefully live better quality lives for a longer period than would normally be expected under such circumstances. The course was truly inspirational for both of us. It taught Helen (and me) how to concentrate on the really important things in life, to ignore the unimportant and to tackle the task of getting the mind focused and the diet rearranged in order to battle the disease by

improving the body's immune system. Helen immediately became a vegetarian (which caused some amusement amongst my beef breeding colleagues – I've recently retired as General Manager of the Australian Poll Hereford Society) and meditation has played a large part in her life ever since.

Who knows what saved her. Maybe it was good surgery, maybe it was good chemotherapy and ray treatment or maybe it was the intervention of The Gawler Foundation that saved Helen's life. It may well be a combination of all three. We will never know but I can assure you the Gawler experience was a huge factor in creating a positive atmosphere that was the catalyst for really getting stuck into fighting the fight with all guns blazing.

It's now nearly 13 years since diagnosis and Helen has recently retired from Head of Languages at the New England Girls' School in Armidale after 20 years of service where she taught French and co-ordinated the International Baccalaureate. Today she is in China on a six-month contract teaching English at the Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics. Touch wood, she has not had a reoccurrence of cancer.

This is truly an inspirational and courageous story about a person who wasn't prepared to die without a fight.

I congratulate you on your initiative in establishing a Cancer Inquiry, which is long overdue. You and your committee are to be applauded for including less conventional therapies in the overall inquiry and for looking at the problem from the patient's perspective. I am absolutely certain organisations such as the Gawler Foundation have played (and will continue to play) an extremely important role in the fight against cancer. Until now these organisations have had to survive to a large extent in the wilderness in relation to their funding. It is vital the inquiry sorts out which of these organisations are really making a significant contribution in the fight against cancer. Once this is done it would be nice to think that Federal funds will be released to assist these groups with their on-going running costs.

I trust the inquiry will also look at more support for research in the field of integrated medicine, the encouragement and support of the training of health professionals in this area, increased public access to the range of choices and information regarding the validity of those choices.

Our own experience highlighted the fact that although Australia has many fine doctors, only a few seem capable of recommending less conventional therapies in relation to cancer which is a shame. The well-credentialed "alternate" (not a word I like) organisations, such as The Gawler Foundation, deserve to be

financially supported by the Federal Government because their work will be so important to the many people who will seek their assistance in the future.

I wish you well in your deliberations.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely

Bill Dangar