

16th March 2005

Senator the Hon Peter Cook
Senator for Western Australia
Australian Labor Party

Re: Cancer Inquiry

Two years ago our lives were turned upside down when my 38-year-old husband was diagnosed with an Astrocytoma Brain Tumour. We followed the doctor's advice and had the surgery, which was partially successful (removal of approximately 1/3 of the tumour), then radiation and chemotherapy. While these treatments have appeared not to change the tumour at all at this stage, all that can be done is to monitor the tumour and wait.

We are fortunate to be able to be treated through the private sector and all the specialists we have seen are very good and knowledgeable in their fields. We did have to wait for radiation therapy due to a lack of radiation technicians (as we were informed that the shortage of technicians was due to them leaving for higher pay rates overseas). Even the specialists also seemed to be in high demand and overloaded with patients, therefore themselves working under a great deal of stress. We realise that there are many other forms of cancer for doctors to specialise in, but there seems to be a shortage of Neurosurgeons in Queensland – adding to the pressure on those here. Increasing the number of staff and further training for nurses and resident doctors working in the cancer wards would be beneficial to the care of patients. It has been evident to us over the past 2 years that the number of staff has decreased. The nurses and staff are stretched to the point where we noticed that the quality of care and service has diminished.

When these treatments were having no impact on my husband's tumour, we started researching ourselves. We found a place called the Gawler Foundation, which offered a program especially designed for Cancer patients and their carers. We decided to participate in the 10day Life & Living residential retreat with them and learnt so much. This program is subsidised by the foundation themselves by 20%, **it actually costs them money to help people**. If only this information was available to us when my husband was first diagnosed. We had to travel to Melbourne, as there is nothing like this available in Queensland. We also had to finance this ourselves and as we are just an everyday family with 2 young children it has been a struggle financially. The information and support we received from the Gawler Foundation is extremely beneficial to my husband's wellness and recovery. The Gawler Foundation helps so many people with cancer and receives no government funding. The service these people provide is in our experience invaluable. On the way home in the plane my husband said to me 'that was the best \$7000 we ever spent', and I'd have to agree. We also have experience with integrated medicine and have found the treatment to be beneficial and again very costly.

It is in our experience with cancer – not always the conventional medical treatments are successful and the complementary or less conventional therapies are proving to be more beneficial form of treatment. We can not speak strongly enough that places like the Gawler Foundation need to be funded so that everyone can have access and benefit from them. Less conventional therapies are very expensive and there are certain procedures, which are common practices for cancer patients, which are not

covered under the Medicare scheme or subsidised in any way, such things as Vitamin Shots and Supplements etc. For example a standard Intravenous Vitamin C Shot is Approximately \$70 and there is no claim for this even through private health cover. With the increased number of people contracting this illness, please also be aware that the number of parking permits for people with disability has also increased. The number of disability parking spaces at public places needs to be increased as soon as possible.

With the increasing focus on the public health system we feel that is the government's responsibility to fund further research into less conventional and complementary treatments for cancer and other illnesses and greater promotion for a healthier life style for all Australians.

I am happy to provide any documentation if required.

Regards

Wendy McCloskey