



SEATH HOLSWICH MP – STATE MEMBER FOR PINE RIVERS

SPEECH IN PARLIAMENT

30th October 2012

INTERNATIONAL BRAIN TUMOUR AWARENESS WEEK

This week in parliament we are highlighting a number of significant events and causes. This morning in the chamber it is great to see so many members wearing red to mark Day for Daniel and it was good to see the deaf community represented in the public gallery. Yesterday, it was great to have the opportunity to raise money for the Pyjama Foundation through the parliamentary city versus country touch football match, which can only be not in peak physical condition.

However, today I want to highlight a cause that does not often get a lot of attention. This week is International Brain Tumour Awareness Week and, to mark this week, I am wearing a silver ribbon. I would like to thank my colleagues who are also wearing a silver ribbon today in the chamber.

Until recently I knew very little about brain cancer. That was until I was contacted by constituents of mine, Katherine and Andrew Landers. In June last year, Katherine and Andrew, with their seven-year-old daughter and with Katherine pregnant with their second child, headed to Westfield Chermerside to do some shopping for their first home, which they had just purchased. After parking the car, they were going up the travelator when Andrew collapsed and had a massive seizure. He was taken to hospital where he had another bigger seizure. A CT scan was undertaken and a large tumour was discovered on his brain. Two days later he had surgery to remove the tumour, but that was only the start of his battle with brain cancer.

On that day, in that instant, the lives of Andrew, Katherine and their young family changed forever. Brain cancer is the only cancer that directly affects both the body and the mind. Because of the risk of further seizures, Andrew had to surrender his motor vehicle licence immediately. Because of that same risk, he could no longer stay home alone with his children. Andrew also had to give up his employment and go on a disability support pension, because it was no longer safe for him to work as a sheet metal engineer. Katherine can only work part time to allow her to care for Andrew and to take him to his ongoing medical appointments.

Andrew has since been through a nine-month course of chemotherapy, which has had significant side effects. Every three months he needs an MRI to determine the progress of the tumour. His tumour is located in the emotional and speech area of the brain, which means he has issues with his speech, easily forgets tasks and can no longer multitask.

For Andrew, Katherine and their family, the hardest part of this invasive disease is the knowledge that the five-year survival rate for brain tumours is only 19 per cent. This compares with survival rates of 83 per cent for prostate cancer and 84 per cent for breast cancer. Let us think for a moment what a massive difference that is: a five-year survival rate is 19 per cent for brain tumour and 84-plus per cent for other types of cancer. Brain cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in people aged under 39 and almost 100 per cent of sufferers will succumb.

At this point in his life -term goal is to see his 10-month-old son start school. Katherine has had to come to an acceptance that her marriage will end a lot sooner than she expected and that, at some point, she will be a single parent. Their seven-year-old daughter has had to learn that her expensive Christmas presents and birthday presents, because the cost of treating brain cancer is 50 per cent higher than the next most expensive cancer. The Cancer Council NSW estimates the out-of-pocket cost to each sufferer at approximately \$149,000. At the age of seven, their daughter has had to understand also that her daddy probably will not be around to see her start high school.

To their credit, Andrew and Katherine are making the most of every day their family has together and are working hard to raise awareness of this disease. I would like to commend the Brain Tumour Alliance Australia and the Brain Tumour Support Service, run by Cancer Council Queensland, for the work they do in supporting sufferers of brain tumours and their families. Currently, brain tumour research funding is low in relation to the burden of the disease and I hope that this can be addressed in coming years.

I urge each of my colleagues in this place to take an opportunity this week to raise awareness of this terrible disease. I am pleased to be able to support Brain Tumour Awareness Week and Andrew and Katherine, who are watching this speech via the parliamentary webcast, as they fight their very personal battle with brain cancer.