

BOWEL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Mr BROCK (Frome) (12:49): I move:

That this house—

- (a) acknowledges that June is Bowel Cancer Awareness Month;
- (b) recognises the thousands of South Australians families impacted by this cancer;
- (c) urges the state government to continue to promote bowel cancer awareness to make South Australians aware of this illness and the symptoms that may lead to contracting this sickness; and
- (d) urges the state government to ensure that adequate measures are in place for the prevention and treatment of this disease.

There are numerous forms of cancer, but today I will focus on bowel cancer. The word 'cancer' can be very frightening and fearful not only for those who have been diagnosed but also for their families. There are four words that we do not expect to hear when we are young, let alone when we are getting on in years—those four words are, 'You have bowel cancer.'

Each year, over 2,000 young Australians hear these words. I will repeat that: over 2,000 young Australians hear these four terrifying words each year. It is a common misconception that bowel cancer is an old person's disease. The reality is that it affects both old and young. I will refer to an email that went to all House of Assembly members yesterday from a particular person, which states:

Unfortunately, one in 13 [people] will receive a bowel cancer diagnosis during [their] lifetime, and 80 people die every week from the disease. It is increasingly being diagnosed in people under 50.

This particular person's son was diagnosed at 22 and, unfortunately, died of bowel cancer at 25, so it does affect very young people.

Bowel cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia and this is expected to continue, with the estimated risk of an individual being diagnosed with bowel cancer by their 85th birthday being one in 11 males and one in 15 females. Many people, whether intentionally or just by overlooking the issue, do not have a medical examination. There are many reasons for a person to contract any form of cancer and I encourage everyone, particularly if you have a family member, including your parents, who has been diagnosed with bowel cancer, to have an examination.

Most cases of bowel cancer start as benign, non-threatening growths called polyps. However, if not treated they can become cancerous tumours. Some of the signs or symptoms may include:

- • bleeding from the back passage or signs of blood after a bowel motion;
- • a change in usual bowel habits, such as straining, constipation or loose motions;
- • weight loss for no obvious reason;
- • symptoms of unexplained tiredness, weakness or other bowel conditions;
- • abdominal pain or bloating; and
- • any concerns you may have about health issues.

I know that these things are not very attractive when speaking about them, but it is very important to note that any of these symptoms are not necessarily indicative of cancer. Other medical conditions, some foods and certain medications can also cause these changes. Pathology testing, physical examination and other diagnostic tools can help doctors determine the cause of any of the symptoms. Anyone experiencing symptoms such as those mentioned should consult a doctor. When diagnosed at the earliest stages, nearly 90 per cent of bowel cancer cases are treatable.

Symptoms suggestive of bowel cancer require timely investigation, such as having a colonoscopy, and this early attention may be the best thing you have done to save your life. The new government's policy coming into the last election that, within 12 months it would wipe out the overdue waiting list for a colonoscopy after a positive FOBT, is welcomed. I welcome and encourage that; however, I hope it can be achieved earlier than the 12 months.

Bowel cancer treatment can be different for different people as everyone reacts differently. Treatments can include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation or a combination of the last two. It was mentioned previously that bleeding may indicate bowel cancer; however, some bowel cancers may not bleed or bleed only every now and then. If there are any concerns whatsoever about any signs, please see your GP, who would be the best person to consult. If necessary, if you do not feel comfortable, get a referral to a specialist in the field.

Bowel cancer affecting men and women, young and old, can often develop without any warning signs. It is Australia's second biggest cancer killer, and it is estimated that 33,000 Australians will die from bowel cancer by 2025. Previous surveys indicate that almost half the number of respondents aged 50 and above were unaware of the recommended bowel cancer screening test, only 38 per cent of respondents knew how often the test should be undertaken, less than one-third of respondents knew the recommended minimum screening age and only 24 per cent of respondents correctly identified bowel cancer risk factors.

Mr Deputy Speaker and members in this house, if you know or hear of somebody who has bowel cancer please do not ignore them. Please talk to them, reassure them and guide them. If you have suffered a form of cancer, talk about it openly. I had prostate cancer. I have been through it, and I have heard those words, 'You have six months to live.' I have said this in this house previously, but I am one of the lucky ones. I came out with great results, and I am fully cleared.

Many of my friends have been through similar circumstances, and we openly talk about it. The issue is that sometimes we males do not talk about this issue, but it is something that we need to be really open and frank about. This allows others to ask questions and also encourages them to speak up and seek early medical advice. Again, please do not be afraid to talk openly about this disease. I commend the motion to the house.