

**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS
COMMITTEE**

**ON THE
SAFETY, REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION AMENDMENT
(FAIR PROTECTION FOR FIREFIGHTERS) BILL 2011**

Submission by: SCOTT MORRISON

1. My name is Scott Bernart Morrison and I am a firefighter that has been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.
2. My journey with cancer began 10 years ago. In August 2001 I was admitted into hospital as it was not known what was wrong with me. I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. I had large cell cancers which are considered aggressive. That was the start of a battle for my life that would span six years and is something I am still very vigilant and concerned about on a daily basis.
3. The date 11th September 2001 is a day of sadness and shock for firefighters as the New York Fire Department lost more than 300 firefighters in the terrorist attacks. For me that day also marked the first round of chemotherapy. I had six rounds of chemotherapy ending on the 24th December 2001. By that stage I had not even told my mother I had cancer as I thought the chemotherapy would be the end of it. But that was not to be.
4. I then went onto a higher dose of chemotherapy where I spent a week in hospital and then was sent home for three weeks. When I was admitted to hospital for the higher dose, I was taken to a bed and asked if I knew fireman Phil. I did and that was apparently his bed. Fireman Phil didn't make it so I told them to keep walking. I needed to be somewhere more positive than that. I was 43 years old and my sons were 11 and 13 years old. They needed a father. I needed to be there to guide them and love them. My wife needed her husband.
5. Due to the amount of chemotherapy and tests, my veins had collapsed so I had a pick (a fine tube from the arm to above the heart so that I could continue with chemotherapy and it would be distributed to the body) inserted. The district nurse came every day I was home and I was receiving an injection in my stomach and flush out the pick.
6. I then went back into hospital for another week. Then I was allowed to go home but again with daily visits from the district nurse.

7. In February 2002 scans revealed that we had not beaten the cancer. I then underwent stem cell transplant treatment where my white cells were harvested and then I was given what they call a fatal dose of chemotherapy before the white blood cells are replaced. This involved an 8-day stay in hospital, then being allowed home for four days. The reason they let me home at that point was because it could have been my last visit home. This time the district nurse still had to come every day but this time I was getting two injections in my stomach every day and flush out my pick.
8. When I was home for those four days I was really sick. When you see dramatizations of people lying on the bathroom floor dry retching and in agony from the treatment – that is what happens. I was unable to eat and if I tried I was unable to keep it down and worse it would send me dry retching for a long period of time.
9. I became increasing as by then my immune system had collapsed and I was severely hydrated which is predictable for the treatment for I had.
10. I was then admitted in hospital for five weeks in isolation. I spent three of those weeks fighting for my life. I was in such pain that there were times when I just wanted to die. It was the most painful experience. It felt like someone was ripping out my stomach. I had no strength to do anything. I am pretty tough and have a high pain threshold having had surgery and injuries before. But this was like nothing I had experienced. It was hard to take because it was like fighting a threat I couldn't see, that could creep up on me and I would just have to suffer through it.
11. I then received the news I needed that my white blood cell count was increasing. That gave me a boost and I could focus on recovery. I regained an appetite and a new found strength.
12. As I recovered I forced myself to walk 1km a day in hospital – walking up and down a 50 meter corridor. I was determined to get well and in my mind a moving target was harder to hit.
13. But that was not the end of it. Scans caused concern so I then had a six-week course of radiation therapy. The scan showed I still had a tumour between was in a lump node between my back and my left kidney and that was why I needed the radiation. My Doctors were saying to me that if the radiation did not work I would be going into palliative care.

14. I looked up the word palliative care and when I realised it meant I would not be cured but would die from it, I decided that was not going to happen yet.
15. The radiation was successful but burnt out the majority of my left kidney.
16. At the end of July 2002 I was clear and remained in remission for 5 years.
17. But my immune system has never been the same. Since 2003 I have had at least 5 skin cancers removed. I have been told that the type of skin cancer was more often found in older people but because of the treatment I had received I was more susceptible because of the damage done by the treatment.
18. I was, and still am, ever vigilant and through self-examination found a lump under my jaw in July 2007. That lump was surgically removed and no further treatment was needed.
19. On the 11th September 2007 I was told that I was again diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. It was gutting. By this time I had met a number of people who had been diagnosed with the disease and had it return. Not all had made it.
20. I was advised the treatment would be radiation to burn out the taste buds and saliva glands in the right side. I was relieved it was not necessary to have further chemotherapy treatments. I had that radiation throughout November 2007 and since then have not been diagnosed with any set back or needed any further treatment.
21. In early 2008 I was asked if I wanted to participate in the Olivia Newton-John Cancer Foundation Great Walk to Beijing. I completed the 250 km walk and was on a high, only to return home to have my 19-year-old son diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. His cancer was unrelated to my cancer but it was the most gut-wrenching time of my life.
22. My son was seriously ill as a result of the chemotherapy treatment and ended up in intensive care on Fathers Day 2008. When we finally got him home I remember holding him and willing all powers to transfer his illness to me. I had been through what he had been through but it was much harder to watch your child go through it. I was a father and supposed to protect my child but I could not protect him from this.

23. I have no doubt that my cancer was a direct result of firefighting. I have always been into health and fitness. I have always been careful about my diet, I rode and swam daily. I was probably what you call a fitness fanatic yet I ended up fighting for my life. There is nothing else in my life-style or family history that would make me vulnerable to that disease. I understand that non-Hodgkin's lymphoma is associated with exposure to toxins and some occupations. I understand there are studies that link firefighting and the disease. My case supports those conclusions as I was very fit and living a healthy lifestyle – the only risks I was taking was going to work.
24. I had worked as a firefighter for 20 years before I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The gear and equipment has changed remarkably over the years but we can't deny that initially we were subjected to the toxins in fires with very little protection.
25. I remember on my first day as a recruit that 30 minutes into a nightshift I attended a fire without a breathing apparatus. I remember panicking because I couldn't breathe. Within about a month I had been conditioned so that I could cope with that situation. Our uniforms were inadequate and there was a lack of regulations. I remember wearing my shoes instead of boots to some fires.
26. Over the years our gear and equipment has improved remarkably and there is a real emphasis on safety. But we can't alleviate all risk. Firefighters take their health seriously and do whatever they can to reduce the risk. We not only have the equipment and gear now, but we use it. This has not stopped the incidence of cancer.
27. I value my life. I want to live. I still have so much living to do. I am forever vigilant regarding my health and my family's health. We have bought a lifestyle block where I intend to build a cabin so that kids with cancer can come and stay in a beautiful spot for a break. I would like to give back because the medical team and the hospital saved my life.
28. This legislation is crucial. As firefighters we put our lives, our health, on the line to protect the community. We are prepared to do that. But the risks we take must be recognised. We can, and do, everything to reduce those risks. Over the years we know more and have better gear and equipment. But the damage may well have been done some time ago. And even with the current gear and equipment we know we can't eliminate all the risk.

29. Our families are greatly affected by the risks we have to take. And it is our families that have to cope if we ultimately don't make it. It is only right that they are looked after without having to go through stressful and costly litigation. If it is more likely than not that our role of firefighting was a cause of the cancer then that should be recognised.

Dated this 27th day of July 2011

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Scott Morrison