

Funding for research into cancers with low survival rates – a submission by Bonnie Palmer.

I had never really come across much about brain cancer in the media before I was diagnosed with it. I had read lots about breast cancer, seen the ads about lung cancer and my two-yearly pap smears kept cervical cancer front of mind, not to mention my mum's death from it almost four years ago. I knew absolutely nothing about brain tumours or brain cancer. This is despite the fact that brain cancer kills more children than any other disease in Australia, and more people under 40 than any other cancer. I'm moved to ask, how on earth can it be that brain cancer receives less than five per cent of Australian Government cancer funding?

As you do when you're diagnosed with an illness, I started to read up on it. I was devastated to learn that if I make it past five years from diagnosis, I'll be part of the only 25% who do. The lucky 1 in 4 ... doesn't feel like great odds to me.

My age doesn't seem to hold me in any better stead either. I thought I was fairly young to be diagnosed with brain cancer, 35, and my doctors have told me all along that this is why I have a better chance at a more positive outcome. But then I keep reading stories of people younger than me who have passed away from brain cancer. So for now I've stopped reading.

I had considered myself in the prime of my life, a successful copywriter on a decent salary who still wants to marry and travel the world. Children, however they may come along, might still have been on the cards. But everything has now been turned completely upside down and I have no idea how much longer I will be on this earth. I know none of us do, but the chances are I will be dead before you.

After diagnosis I had brain surgery to remove as much of the tumour as was considered safe. Because it was so close to where my speech is controlled my surgeon could only remove a very small part. That was followed by six weeks of radiotherapy Monday to Friday, so 30 sessions in all. And now I'm two months into a 12-month chemotherapy regime which involves taking 5 tablets every 28 days. I'm almost 6 months into my treatment and I have no idea what my medical team consider my odds of 'long-term survival' yet, I don't even know what you'd consider 'long-term' when it comes to brain cancer.

They say a positive mindset is crucial to coping with cancer, however it's really challenging to feel hopeful when all you read about is people dropping like flies just a couple of years after diagnosis.

We need a new funding that model enables research into brain cancers and helps develop a more personalised approach that leads to better outcomes, as well as to support clinical trials. Why do I deserve less of a chance at survival than someone with breast cancer? Why do I have to consider another five years of my life a bonus, another ten years a minor miracle? I just want a decent shot at life and you have the power to enable that. I'm calling on you to increase funding for brain cancers to give all sufferers and their friends and family that most powerful of healing tonics, hope.