

# SENATOR THE HON PETER COOK

Senator for Western Australia  
Australian Labor Party

10 February 2005

## Cancer Inquiry

The Inquiry by the Senate Community Affairs Committee into services available to persons diagnosed with cancer and into options for treatment, including less conventional therapies is aimed at being of practical assistance to the 1 in 4 Australian families hit by cancer.

Cancer has now replaced heart disease as the biggest single cause of death among Australians, but in my experience people diagnosed with cancer often have to make life affecting decisions at short notice, in a traumatised state of mind with very little information about the range of options available to them.

Specialist health care in Australia is among the best in the world but there is a bewildering number of adjuvant therapies and less conventional approaches which offer varying degrees of help, some over stated some not, which can be significant, if not decisive in aiding the healing process.

Patients often need assistance in assessing how these stack up and which of them might provide help.

Reasonably doctors tend to stick with scientifically proven treatments whereas patients are often desperately looking for the most promising options in order to improve their odds. This dichotomy and the dismissive attitude conventional medicine often exhibits towards less conventional treatments can leave patients worried and confused about what to do.

On the other hand, lack of data and the cost of less conventional or adjuvant therapies creates frustration and uncertainty too. I hope this Inquiry can shed some light on these issues.

I also hope the Inquiry will look at these problems from the point of view of patients. The health debate is understandably dominated by Doctors, health care professionals, health bureaucrats and academics all with the apparent needs of the patients at heart but with transparent self interests of their own.

If this Inquiry can stand in the shoes of patients, and unambiguously take their point of view it will be a breath of fresh air.

*Please find attached the terms of reference for the inquiry.*

For further information contact Senator Cook's office on 02 6277 3700.

#### TERMS OF REFERENCE:

**4 Senator Cook:** To move—That the following matters be referred to the Community Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report by 23 June 2005:

- (a) the delivery of services and options for treatment for persons diagnosed with cancer, with particular reference to:
  - (i) the efficacy of a multi-disciplinary approach to cancer treatment,
  - (ii) the role and desirability of a case manager/case co-ordinator to assist patients and/or their primary care givers,
  - (iii) differing models and best practice for addressing psycho/social factors in patient care,
  - (iv) differing models and best practice in delivering services and treatment options to regional Australia and Indigenous Australians, and
  - (v) current barriers to the implementation of best practice in the above fields; and
- (b) how less conventional and complementary cancer treatments can be assessed and judged, with particular reference to:
  - (i) the extent to which less conventional and complementary treatments are researched, or are supported by research,
  - (ii) the efficacy of common but less conventional approaches either as primary treatments or as adjuvant/complementary therapies, and
  - (iii) the legitimate role of government in the field of less conventional cancer treatment.

