

CHILDHOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Statement

HON MATTHEW SWINBOURN (East Metropolitan) [9.57 pm]: It was my pleasure earlier tonight to be part of a small but important event on the steps of Parliament, which was to turn Parliament gold for Childhood Cancer Awareness. That means that the lights projected onto Parliament will be of a gold colour, if we can call it that, to help raise awareness of childhood cancers. This event was organised in conjunction with the Presiding Officers and an organisation called the Golden Octopus Foundation. The Golden Octopus Foundation was started by young and rather remarkable woman named Keely Johnson only a couple of years ago in Queensland. She has managed to raise the profile of her organisation quite considerably and it has now become a national foundation with a number of goals. The logo of the foundation is an octopus, not surprisingly considering it is called the Golden Octopus Foundation. The octopus's name is Ollee, named in part after the country singer Lee Kernaghan, a former Australian of the year, who, I think, is the patron of the organisation and highly supportive of it. Ollee represents the eight groups of childhood cancer through his eight arms. The foundation's objectives include, amongst other things, improving oncology facilities in all regional areas, including the implementation of childhood cancer nurses to help alleviate the long stays that children from regional areas often have away from their families, friends and communities. The foundation also has the more general objectives of raising awareness of childhood cancers, providing support to children with cancer and their families, and raising funds to support research, with the long-term goal of assisting families to access medical trials, particularly for those children who have rare cancers for which conventional treatments are often not available.

As many members may know, my middle son, Mitchell, has cancer. He was able to join us today on the steps of Parliament House with my other two sons and my wife, Glenda. I think most of the significance of the event was missed by him, but he did get to take a plush Ollee the octopus home with him. I should have kept one to show members because they are quite cute, but members can view Ollee the octopus on the foundation's website.

We were fortunate to take Mitchell to the United States in July to the National Institutes of Health, a very impressive medical institution that I am sure many members are familiar with, to attend a clinic for one of his types of cancers—a GIST clinic. Although the National Institutes of Health is primarily a research institution, it provides a clinic for many people with rare cancers to come to the US to speak to experts in their field. We were able to speak to a number of experts in the field of Mitchell's very rare cancer, including one of the individuals after whom his cancer is named—Dr Stratakis. The spelling is quite complicated, and I am sure Hansard will ask me to provide it at some stage. It was a little bit of a thrill, among other things, to meet the person who had properly described Mitchell's condition only a couple of years ago. Mitchell's condition is, as I said in my inaugural speech, truly rare in the truest meaning of that word. He is the only person in Western Australia known to have the conditions he has and, as far as we are aware, in the last 20 years or so there has not been a reported case of it in Australia and only a handful of people have it. One of the issues for children who have rare cancers is the lack of available treatments because there are not the numbers to justify investment into research that would go into other more common forms of cancers. Unfortunately, children with rare cancers often have fatality rates that are not reflected in the more common and, I would hazard to say, "garden variety" forms of childhood cancer. There is no such thing as a "garden variety" form of cancer, but I am sure members will catch my drift as to what I mean.

If members notice that the Parliament is looking a bit gold, that is the reason. It is important that when events like this occur we support them as much as we can, because awareness is critical for making changes. Members will probably hear me speak about childhood cancers again. I encourage everyone in this house to do what they can to support organisations like the Golden Octopus Foundation and to help find treatments and cures for childhood cancers.

Members: Hear, hear!

House adjourned at 10.02 pm
