

Unlocking secrets to Barry's cancer fight win

Cathy O'Leary | Medical Editor | November 20, 2015, 6:33 am

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Mesothelioma survivor Barry Knowles and wife Renee. Picture: Sharon Smith / The West Australian

Barry Knowles is a medical phenomenon that even doctors cannot explain.

Given only months to live almost six years ago, the 71-year-old has incredibly survived the asbestos-related disease mesothelioma without the help of drugs.

He has now agreed to work with researchers, providing blood samples so they can try to discover how he managed to fight off the disease.

One theory is that his immune system kicked in, launching its own assault on the cancer. How and why are the questions ground-breaking WA research will try to answer.

The retired builder has set up the Reflections Through Reality Foundation, to raise funds for the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research.

The foundation is being launched today by WA Governor Kerry



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Sanderson at a lunch hosted by the Rotary Club of Perth, which is a partner on the project.

The father of four daughters was diagnosed with mesothelioma in 2010, after working since the age of 14 in a job in which he lived and breathed asbestos.

He had no symptoms of the deadly disease when it was picked up by chance during an x-ray. He had fallen out of a fruit tree, the scan showing several cracked ribs but also a sinister shadow on his left lung.

"I knew in my heart of hearts what it was straight away because by then the dangers of asbestos and mesothelioma had become widely known," Mr Knowles said.

"People like me who had worked in the industry for years were walking on egg shells, just waiting for the day someone would say we had it."

Mr Knowles was given six to nine months to live, and 18 weeks of chemotherapy failed to even make a dent.

His oncologist told him he only had weeks to live and it was not worth trying to treat the disease so he should try to make the most of his time left.

Mr Knowles was referred to palliative care and sent to respiratory expert Professor Bill Musk for monitoring, who noticed the fluid reducing and his lungs becoming inflated even though he was not having any treatment.

"So here I am now, for all intents and purposes nothing wrong with me, and a few doctors agree it's a miracle," he said.

"Because I've gone almost six years now since my diagnosis I recently felt I could contribute to research into a cure for this terrible disease, provided it wasn't invasive because I didn't want to wake the sleeping tiger."

Heading the new lines of research is Professor Bruce Robinson, director of the National Centre of Asbestos Related Disease, whose work recently won \$2.5 million in Federal funding.

Professor Robinson believes his team is close to developing a vaccine that could "wake up" the body's immune system so that it could attack and shrink a tumour.

Rotary Club of Perth president Graham Peden said several Rotary clubs in WA had now pledged to raise funds for the foundation.

To donate to the foundation go to reflections.org.au.

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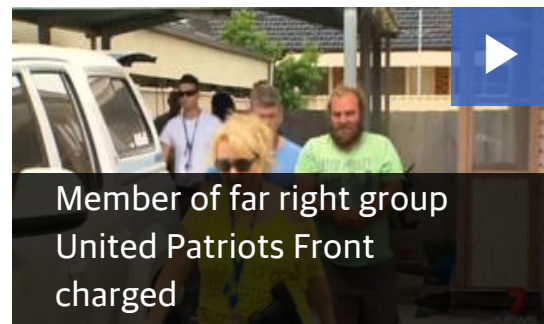


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