

**NATIONAL BREAST CANCER FOUNDATION
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, WEDNESDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2018**

Good evening and welcome to this reception to mark the commencement of Breast Cancer Awareness Month of the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land—the Mouheneener people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights.

This is a really important month for the Foundation, for its supporters and volunteers and I would like to acknowledge quite a few individuals and organisations. These are, in no particular order:

- Rhonda Hall and 12 Oaks Equestrian;
- Lyne Chadwick;
- Judi Adams, who does so much organizational and other work;
- Zanotti Designs;
- Janelle McMillan;
- Long term volunteers of the Hobart Volunteer Committee;
- McMurray Insurance Brokers;
- Street and Garden, the award-winning designers sponsoring Hobart City Council's light up for the month of October;
- Lord Mayor Ron Christie;
- The Honourable Elise Archer MP;
- Alderman Debra Thurley;
- The Old Woolstore for ongoing support;
- Dragons Abreast
- Shannons Insurance and Rod Belbin for supporting the Take Your Tops Off for Breast Cancer Research, now a National Event that started here in Hobart;
- The Australian Italian Club;
- Ken Hall, and Tony and Madelaine Thomson;
- The Tasmanian Racing Club and Tas Racing;

- and our excellent media: The Mercury; ABC Radio Hobart; 7HO FM; Win TV; and Southern Cross Austereo.

The National Breast Cancer Foundation does such wonderful work by funding breast cancer research with money raised entirely by the Australian public to help detect tumours earlier, improve treatment outcomes and ultimately save lives.

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia, with eight women dying from the disease every day. Incidence is on the rise but the good news is that survival rates are improving and in 2016, the five-year survival rate reached an all-time high of 90%.

In terms of early detection it is exciting to hear that among the projects funded by the Council is Associate Professor Sarah-Jane Dawson's research into the development of a new blood test which acts as a 'liquid biopsy', an alternative to invasive tissue biopsies, which will improve detection rates and detect relapse.

Professor Riccardo Dolcetti's research into new strategies to improve personalised immunotherapy of breast cancer is another exciting development.

Given the high incidence of breast cancer, all of us have a breast cancer story. For those of with friends or family with metastatic breast cancer, improvement in survival rates are encouraging. But we still have a long way to go.

In 2016, at the Council's Think Pink Race Day, I told the story of my friend and University colleague who was just celebrating surviving 5 years after her diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer. Julia had been told in 2011 that her survival was a case of 'when' not 'if'. She astounded me by her positive attitude, courage and sense of humour. She was determined not to 'turn either into a doom-ridden misery or into a cancer saint but to be as normal and ordinary as possible'.

After the initial chemotherapy which successfully reduced the size of the primary tumour and the secondaries in her liver, she had herceptin infusions

every three weeks and hormone suppressant drugs. In the following year, she returned to work at her University, finished a book and we successfully applied for two ARC grants.

For five years we continued to work on our research project together, meeting in Melbourne to interview jurors and after I became Governor still occasionally presenting at conferences and writing papers. Julia enjoyed her family, their wedding and triumphs, and imported a gorgeous little retro Japanese car, a mauve Nissan Figaro.

Then in November last year a routine scan revealed that one of tumours in her liver had become resistant to her current drug regime and had started to grow again. This meant she could not present with our research team at a conference in Canberra in December. She added:

I am OK, but it means another period of tough treatment and a new battle to keep my hair. I am not catastrophizing, and was half prepared, so I am bearing up well. I will keep you posted.

A few days later she messaged,

I am fine – this day was always going to come and I am calm and well prepared 😊

This meant that she was back on a harsh chemotherapy treatment regime with all its side effects including hair loss despite the use of ice caps. Scans in mid-January revealed shrinkage in both the primary and secondary tumours.

In February I went to Adelaide to see her, and over two days we worked on an article for three or so hours each day and drove to lunch in the gorgeous mauve Nissan Figaro.

In April more scans revealed that the standard Herceptin infusions and anti-hormone drugs were holding the lesions steady. But the harsh chemo had taken its toll and she needed to embark on a fitness regime with a rehabilitation team with the aim of getting fit and well enough to get back to work by the end of the year.

In the winter 'flu struck and Julia was in bed for six weeks after which she explained to me she felt like 'a brain in a vat and completely isolated from the real world'. Her plans to visit me this month and stay at Government House

had to be postponed when it became clear in mid-September that the primary tumour in her breast was getting too big to leave untreated. Two weeks ago she messaged me:

I'm not exactly thrilled about this development, but I can't let that bloody thing get the idea that it can do whatever it wants, so radiation is the least worst option.

So a course of radiation has begun and plans to come and stay here postponed until November. I do so hope that this shrinks the tumour and that she gets some more time. She has done so much better than a 10% chance of surviving 5 years after the news she had responded well to the Herceptin regime (I have to say she has always been in the top 10% of whatever she does if not the top 1%)!

Julia's oncologist assures her that he has a lot more drugs in his arsenal that he can try and, as time passes, new treatments become available. So it is that the vital importance of breast cancer research is highlighted for me.

So thank you for your support for the National Breast Cancer Foundation.