

MRS JANE MCGRATH

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (12.22 p.m.)—On indulgence, I rise to speak in this debate on the passing of Mrs Jane McGrath AM. Jane was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 1996. She was just 31. She fought a secondary cancer in her hip and in 2006 was diagnosed with a brain tumour and sadly passed away on 22 June this year, with her husband, Glenn, and their two children by her side. Along with her husband, Jane founded the McGrath Foundation after first battling breast cancer. The foundation provides breast cancer education and breast cancer nurses for women suffering from the disease. Jane was always determined to leave a legacy, an echo that would last through eternity that one brave woman could make a difference. Jane wrote:

I was only 31 when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I feel very passionate about empowering women under 40 to take control of their health by conducting regular breast checks—early detection saves lives.

Chief Executive of the National Breast Cancer Foundation, Sue Murray, said Jane had always been encouraging of other women with breast cancer. She went further to say:

The role model that she has presented to women right throughout her journey has been inspiring, has been very supportive and very encouraging for all women who go through breast cancer.

Breast cancer unfortunately is the most common invasive cancer amongst Australian women. In 2002, 12,027 Australian women were diagnosed with breast cancer. The incidence rate of breast cancer in women rose from 80 cases per 100,000 females in 1982 to 117 cases per 100,000 in 2002, an average increase of two per cent per annum. The risk of breast cancer increases with age—24 per cent of breast cancer cases diagnosed in 2002 were women younger than 50 years, 50 per cent were women aged 50 to 69 and 26 per cent were women aged 70 and over. The five-year relative survival rate for Australian women with breast cancer during 1998 to 2002 was 86.6 per cent compared with 70.9 per cent in the preceding five years. So progress is being made, yet there is still so much more to do.

It is estimated that there are well over 110,000 women alive today who have been diagnosed with breast cancer in the previous 20 years. To all of you survivors: I salute you and I urge you to press on and embrace life. You inspire us all with your courage and the dignity with which you live. But, sadly, 2,641 women died from breast cancer in Australia in 2005. That is 2,641 too many.

Breast cancer survivors need heroes and Jane McGrath was such a hero. Few families are left unscarred by this insidious disease. When my sister-in-law—my brother's wife, Keren—was diagnosed with breast cancer four years ago, it impacted on the whole family. Keren was in her early 30s, not unlike Jane, and she had two very small children, yet we watched her courage and determination during six long months of treatment. We watched her fight to live—taking every day as a blessing, treasuring family and friends and in turn being an inspiration to those around her. Fighters like Jane McGrath, indeed like Keren Robert, do that for our nation. They lift our spirits; they remind us that what matters is not what life dishes up to us but what we do with the life that we have been given. Jane's passing, as is the passing of every life due to cancer, is a tragedy. Yet in the midst of pain we look forward to hope and in the midst of anguish we pray that we can continue to find true meaning in life through faith, family and friends. Jane's passing is a national tragedy, yet it steels our collective resolve in this place to do more—and I know that collectively we will do more.