

Support for brain tumour patients and their carers

Finding out you have a brain tumour can be devastating news for a person and their family.

It can turn your world upside down, sending you and your loved ones on a rollercoaster ride of specialist appointments, tests, treatment, medication, surgery and long hospital stays.

Each case is different, and each person will react differently to the news, but support is available.

Waikato Hospital's Brain Tumour Support Group is for people with brain tumours and their caregivers and family to connect with others in a similar situation and share experiences.

Glenn Major has two brain tumours and regularly attends the meetings with his wife Heather for emotional and educational support.

"It's a place where any question is okay to ask.

"You can talk with others who understand what you are going through and know how much something like this can change your life," Heather said.

Their story started 11 years ago when a scan showed a malignant tumour on Glenn's brain.

He was 28 at the time.

Since then, the Hamilton couple's lives have changed dramatically.

Glenn has undergone four operations, radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatment and he now lives with disabilities.

Heather is Glenn's full-time carer.

"We can't live too far in the future and we live with uncertainty.

"For a long time we didn't know anyone else in the same situation so the group

has been fantastic and helps us both," she said.

Waikato District Health Board social worker, Cherie McDowall facilitates the monthly meetings that alternate between open group discussions and guest speakers from a range of health backgrounds.

"It's a safe forum that empowers people to feel like they can talk about their situation openly and learn from others who are having similar experiences," she said.

Glenn was told in 2004 that he would not survive but has outlived doctors' prognosis and continues to fight the cancer.

They recently received positive news that the tumours have shrunk.

"I enjoy telling my story and giving hope to other people," he said.

Heather says Glenn's disabilities are sometimes the hardest to come to terms with.

"The worst part for me is that he cannot speak very well and I actually don't understand what he is saying half the time.

"The support group allows me to talk about these things and other taboo subjects that can be difficult to talk about with people who haven't experienced it," she said.

Cherie says there are probably more people out in the community who would benefit from the group.

"Being diagnosed with a brain tumour can be a huge emotional journey for the patient and their family.

"Whether you are newly diagnosed, awaiting surgery or been told that there's no other treatment available, the group could be worthwhile to you.

"Come see what it's like. You can say as



FAMILY SUPPORT: Glenn, Heather and Rachel Major are grateful for the support for Waikato Hospital's Brain Tumour Support Group. The group has been supporting families since 2004.

little or as much as you want," she said.

Away from the support group, Heather and Glenn live as much of a normal life as possible with their daughter Rachel and supportive family and friends.

They are currently looking forward to celebrating their 15th wedding anniversary together next year.

"The doctors initially said we wouldn't make it to 10 years so it will be a special occasion for us," Heather said.

The next Brain Tumour Support Group meeting is on Wednesday 15 October at Waikato Hospital.

For more information, contact social worker Cherie McDowall (07) 839 8899.



POOL TIME: Benjamin Henwood helps his son Cameron practice visual skills in Waikato Hospital's hydrotherapy pool.

Warm water aids rehabilitation

FOR hundreds of years, physicians all around the world have prescribed water therapy as a treatment for common health ailments and Waikato Hospital is no exception.

More than 70 patients exercise in the 35-degree heat of the hospital's hydrotherapy pool on a daily basis to aid their recovery from stroke, injury or surgery.

Kylie Parker, physiotherapy team leader said they encourage patients of all ages to use the pool as part of physiotherapy and rehabilitation.

"We have people using the pool as a part of their stroke rehabilitation, following surgery or injury, as well as pregnant women and children with disabilities.

"Hydrotherapy for children is fun as well as therapeutic. The water allows them to experience more freedom of movement.

"It can also be a time for the parent and child to bond and enjoy therapy in a relaxing environment whilst building water confidence," said Mrs Parker.

The use of child friendly

equipment makes therapy more enjoyable and effective for children.

Bubbles are used in the pool with young children to help them practice visual skills such as looking and tracking. Kick boards and other floatation devices like noodles are also used.

"Ultimately, each activity in the pool is designed to improve a person's health and wellbeing with exercise programmes tailored specifically to them.

"The buoyancy and resistance provided by water assists with their exercise programs.

"It's not for everyone, but the warm water provides a relaxing and supportive environment to gain muscle relaxation and the weightless feeling in the water makes it easier for some patients to exercise."

Any person under the care of a Waikato District Health Board physiotherapist can have access to the pool at Waikato Hospital, if appropriate. Patients reap the full benefits from the water if used in conjunction with other physiotherapy or rehabilitation treatment.

Joining the fight for Waikato women

Waikato District Health Board has joined the fight against cervical cancer.

Approximately 160 New Zealand women are diagnosed with cervical cancer every year and 60 are dying from the disease annually.

A new health initiative looks to save 30 lives every year with a new vaccine, which is now being offered in the Waikato region.

Waikato DHB medical officer of health Felicity Dumble, is passionate about the new vaccination and the campaign to 'educate and vaccinate' as many eligible Waikato females as possible.

"Why would you not take the opportunity to prevent illness and death where you have the opportunity?" asked Dr Dumble.

Starting next week, that is exactly what Waikato DHB and its 20 counterparts throughout the country are going to attempt by offering free vaccinations against the human papillomavirus (HPV).

The national campaign will see

all girls and young women born in 1990-1991 (17 and 18-year-olds) offered the free vaccination from September 1, and in 2009, all young women aged 12-19 also receiving the vaccination at no cost through their schools.

HPV is a very common virus that spreads through sexual contact. It infects four out of five people at some stage during their lifetime and more than 99 per cent of cervical cancer links to infection by HPV.

The vaccination, which is hoped to greatly reduce the incidence of the virus, comes in the form of Gardasil, which extensive testing has shown to be highly effective, lasting at least five years.

Dr Dumble said she was not disillusioned about the fact there will be opposition to the vaccination, particularly around starting the three-course vaccine from the age of 12.

"The reason for offering vaccinations to girls from 12 years is because the vaccine is most

effective in girls who are not yet sexually active, as they will not have been exposed to HPV. "Even though that stage may be years away for these girls, having your daughter vaccinated now will mean she has far less risk of developing cervical cancer in the future."

Dr Dumble said it was also hard to market the vaccine, as the effects will not be truly apparent for some years.

"When you tell young people that this could save their lives in 20-30 years time, it is hard for them to grasp the validity of that," she said.

"However, another nasty side effect of HPV is genital warts, which is a lot more real for teenagers so we will endeavour to hit home that message as well."

Introduction of the vaccination programme happens in two phases in the Waikato, with all primary care services starting vaccinations for eligible girls next week, followed by intermediate and high schools next year.

For more information about the HPV vaccine and campaign, visit www.waikatodhb.govt.nz



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