

Sarah Murdoch's speech to the National Press Club
Wednesday 24 September 2008

Breast cancer research costs a fortune!
Not doing it costs more.

Good afternoon.

I take this opportunity to thank the National Press Club for inviting me again to speak on behalf of the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Many of you may not know that back in 2006, the Press Club's invitation to me was one of the few given to a 'Not for Profit' organisation. The response was overwhelming, and in two years, we have almost doubled our fund-raising income.

So thank you, very, very much.

I see many of you have worn your pink ribbons today - thank you - too. For those who are not yet wearing a pink ribbon, please grab your envelope from the table and put it on - now!

By wearing a pink ribbon, we have the opportunity to think of every person affected by Breast Cancer. Every ribbon tells a story - that's why we are here today.

Last year, almost one million Australians bought our pink ribbons. But, - this was only part of our story. These little pink ribbons are one our biggest annual fundraisers. The Australian public, our volunteers and corporate partners generated \$16.2 million that will go into new research next year. Through their determination, we are able to continue our efforts and see real results in research into early detection - better identification - easier management, and less painful treatments. Our hope is to find the cure to defeat this insidious disease, but in the meantime, we are doing everything we can to keep it at bay.

Last year - Worldwide - Breast Cancer took the lives of more than half a million women - and many men. In the past 12 months alone, Breast Cancer claimed 2,500 thousand lives here in Australia; several hundred lives were lost here in the ACT.

I don't know how many of those lives lost were journalists.

I do know that they all died too young.

I do know that they were mothers, daughters, sisters, lovers, friends, wives, neighbours, or co-workers to many of you here today.

I don't need to ask you to raise your hands to show me how many of you have known someone who has been diagnosed, treated or taken by Cancer. Because I know - it is too many.

Today, I need to deliver four important messages to you all.

Message # 1

One woman in eight will hear, "I'm so sorry, you have Breast Cancer". Sadly, Breast Cancer is still the number one cause of cancer deaths in women. It is still claiming too many lives and devastating too many families. My first task today is to tell you what's happening with Breast Cancer both here in Australia and worldwide - right now.

Message # 2,

Since I spoke here last, just 24 months ago, many thousands of Australians have moved mountains to defeat the trend. We are forever grateful to our volunteers, our partners, our contributing corporates, our benefactors, - the government and the whole not-for profit sector. My second message is to bring you up to date with what we have achieved this past two years, and offer our thanks to so many people.

Message # 3

Is my report to you on our National Action Plan. The first of its kind in Australia - enabling our best researchers and scientists to collaborate and pool their resources to better tackle the big questions in breast cancer.

Lastly, our big announcement message:

A \$5 million research partnership with Australia's Breast Cancer screening services.

This will be a world first, to bring better understanding on the how's and why's of breast cancer, the mitigation of the risks, and how we can prolong life after Breast Cancer.

So, what is breast cancer?

Back in 460 BC, Hippocrates, the founding father of Western Medicine was the first man to describe Breast Cancer. He had observed it, thought about it, talked about it and had tried to do something about it. Over the centuries that followed, learned physicians in Egypt tried, Arabian and European doctors tried; American Indians, African Witch doctors and Aboriginal healers all tried to do something about Breast Cancer. For over two thousand year, they all observed, learnt and tried to do something about Breast Cancer. In European history, we saw preparations of herbal remedies, application, concoctions - lead and quicksilver pulses, astringents and salves all tried to do something about it

And throughout history, what was the only remedy...? The surgical option - "Cut off the affected breast without anaesthetic". Despite all published learning - everyone knew that surgical removal of the tumour could not affect a cure - the cancer would recur.

Tragically, women died from shock, blood loss, infection and ultimately advanced cancer. And this was happening right up to, and including, the 20th century.

Today, we are still removing cancerous breasts ...

A little more successfully - certainly -

With anaesthetics - thankfully -

And no longer as an experimental procedure...

...But, we are still removing cancerous breasts.

It is 2008 and treatments are getting much better, more specific and more individual, but we still don't have a cure - we still don't understand what causes Breast Cancer.

With all the wonders of modern technology, we still tell women that early detection is their best hope.

Worldwide, each year, more than one million women and men are diagnosed with Breast Cancer. Every 29 seconds, one woman will hear the words, "I'm so sorry, you have Breast Cancer".

Last year, across the globe, 548,000 women died from Breast Cancer. That's one every 75 seconds.

In the 24 months since I was here at the Press Club to launch Breast Cancer Month 2006 – one of our brightest stars, Kylie Minogue, heard the words, “I’m so sorry, you have Breast Cancer”.

And we have all seen, read or heard of the sad, untimely, wasteful deaths of Belinda Emmett and Jane McGrath. These are three high profile women, the faces of Breast Cancer in our magazines and on TV. Yet, in these past two years nearly 30,000 women have heard the words, “I’m so sorry, you have Breast Cancer”.

And another 5,000 - lost their lives.

As I said earlier, Breast Cancer treatments have improved significantly and, because we now know that each Breast Cancer is so individual, so must be the treatments.

But, chemotherapy is chemotherapy. Anyone going through chemo today knows it is barbaric. Why must we still bombard our cells, good and bad, with a lethal combination of toxic chemicals? To many survivors, chemo is worse than Cancer.

People often ask me, “Why are you so passionate about medical research”. And I reply, “Without research, we would never see the treatments and cures that so many of us take for granted”. At the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, another organisation I am most passionate about, our children can take advantage of so many modern medical discoveries.

Life-saving vaccines, asthma inhalers, complex antibiotics; modern medical research continues to bring the greatest discoveries of the 21st century right into our family lives.

Just last month, a young woman introduced herself into my life. Katherine, a survivor of Breast Cancer, had modern cancer treatments and went on to have a family of own, a son. Katherine told me how she had a dozen or so different treatments options available to her in her time of greatest need. If it had been ten years earlier, Katherine would have had only one option.

That’s ten life-preserving options in ten years and we are still counting.

A cure is elusive, but, research is rapidly increasing our knowledge of Breast Cancer and the best individual ways to treat it. Improved treatments means we have decreased breast cancer deaths by 22% over the past decade.

This is great, but we want more, - a lot more.

So, what have we all been up to in the last two years?

Let me tell you, we've done a lot.

In this very room, I announced funding for a West Australian research project to test the idea of a Breast Cancer breath test much like a Breath Tester.

How good is this?

A non-invasive, easy to use, cheap diagnostic tool available nationally in city and country clinics, at your local GP, with instant results - positive or negative! If you have even just a hint of Breast Cancer, the Breath Tester will point you to a full Mammogram.

And early treatment to avoid an early death.

Well today, we are well into our study; we have recruited 300 women and are comparing their results with 40 women known to have invasive Breast Cancer. This work is getting a lot of support.

This could be one answer to one of our big questions.

So, what else has happened at the NBCF in the two years?

I have some very interesting achievements to report to you from our National Action Plan:

- We have committed \$20 million to new research, including \$10 million for two large-scale collaborative programs over the next five years.
One research group is using nanotechnology to develop a simple blood test to detect when the cancer begins to spread.
The second group is identifying proteins common to conditions for which drug treatments already exist; giving us new uses for readily available, tried and tested drugs...

- We have supported 35 new Australian research projects, including scholarships and fellowships to build research leadership for the future.
- We have made real discoveries too. We found a common 'cold-like' virus can reduce the size, even eliminate, some cancer tumours in the laboratory - this is now in clinical trials.
- kConFab - an NBCF initiated research network - made a huge discovery this year. Families with a BRCA2 gene mutation, already linked to breast and ovarian cancers, now show links to prostate cancer. We now know that men in families with this gene are FOUR times more likely to develop prostate cancer.
- We found a naturally occurring protein that targets and kills Breast Cancer cells without destroying healthy ones. This protein can reduce the size of tumours that spread to, and destroy, the bone - a huge problem with Breast Cancer.
- We have increased all knowledge about the role of stem cells - hormones - genetics and metastatic disease
- We have established funding partnerships with Cancer Australia and state cancer councils to co-fund new research initiatives. By collaborating with these funding organisations, we ensure that the vital dollars donated to Breast Cancer research are for maximum public benefit.
- We now know that Breast Cancer is not the same in every woman:
 - We know - not all women respond equally to the same treatments.
 - We know - multi-disciplinary cares achieves better health outcomes but, not all women have access to such quality care
 - We don't yet know - the profile of every woman's disease
 - We do know - this is very important.
- We already knew that life-long physical activity helps reduce risk. Now we know that exercise plays a big part in helping women recover from the treatment and reducing side effects.
- We know that early detection and early treatment are the keys to longer survival.

Not bad for two years work, But, there's more

- Earlier this year we proudly initiated - Pink Circles, a new club of benefactors where membership starts at \$1 Million. We welcomed the inaugural members in 2008 and they are: Women In Super - David Jones - News Ltd - Target Australia - GHD - Diva and Lady Mary Fairfax. Your contribution makes a great difference and is an inspiration to others. Thank you. Applications are open - anyone can join the club! Come and see me - now

For all of you who contribute to NBCF, you are already in my club. In the last two years, you held 10,000 Pink Ribbon Breakfasts right around Australia, raising more than \$5 million.

Thank you!

Let me illustrate how much a role everyone plays in funding our work:

- To launch Breast Cancer Month - here in Canberra - Estee Lauder Companies Global Illumination event will see the city bathed in pink from Old to New Parliament Houses.
- 18 Australian Universities will be lit Pink - illuminating the links between our fundraising and the research done in these institutions
- From Kalgoorlie to Cairns, 21 communities will illuminate local monuments
- During October, 12 cities will host special gala events to raise much needed extra funds
- Pink Ribbon magazine will publish its seventh edition bringing the total funds raised to more than \$700,000 - and it's a good read...
- Pink Ribbons and pins will be on sale at 10,000 retail counters - and we hope to sell every pin
- More than 60 products will be on sale with donations direct to NBCF.

Importantly, in October, in just one month, we aim to raise more than \$5 million towards next year's research program.

The research, the stories, the statistics and resultant knowledge show us we are making progress in understanding Breast Cancer. And this progress motivates the National Breast Cancer Foundation and all our sister organisations in working together and focusing our attention on the

impacts of the disease – throughout October. So that our researchers can continue - all year.

Please, never ever forget, Australians have proven capable of significant discoveries in medical research - many with global impact. We are continuing on that chosen path.

Today, I am very proud, and privileged, to make a special announcement:

- The National Breast Cancer Foundation is establishing a third research collaboration, with Five million dollars to be committed to a partnership with Australia's Breast Cancer screening services.
- Starting with BreastScreen Victoria, this collaboration will provide many more opportunities for women to contribute to our research about risk factors, the importance of screening and developing individualised treatment.
- We need to know more about risk factors such as; the individual environments, obesity, alcohol consumption, exercise or the lack of it, ... the list goes on...

Survival longevity has improved –...

This year, nearly 90% of Australian-born women diagnosed with Breast Cancer can expect to be living five years hence.

Just one generation ago – it was only 70%.

What is behind this 20% gain, can we go further, longer?

Now to BreastScreen.

You remember those mobile vans that travel around the country?

Australia is recognised as having one of the most comprehensive, well-coordinated BreastScreen programs in the world. Funded by Federal, State and Territory Governments, BreastScreen Australia provides free Breast Cancer Screening for healthy women between the ages of 50 to 69 years. This wonderful service is helping save many lives. But, it is neither resourced, nor funded, to contribute to research.

Our \$5 million will build the foundation for a national, and even international, cohort study. In phase one, the research team along with BreastScreen Victoria will recruit up to 200,000 women to provide information about themselves and their lifestyles, what they are doing to

prolong their lives and, ask them to participate in long-term future research.

Following phase one, the program will roll out across Australia enabling all women to choose to support its further development.

Once established, this resource will support further studies on prevention, screening and treatments aimed at reducing the impact of Breast Cancer. This will be a world-class resource, enabling cutting-edge research. This could even provide a model for other cancers where screening is available - such as bowel cancer - and even prostate cancer.

Because, collaboration drives success.

I believe this collaboration will be one of the most significant and enduring contributions to Breast Cancer research ever undertaken in Australia.

So, two thousand, four hundred and sixty-eight years ago, almost to the day, Hippocrates took the first steps to defeat Breast Cancer. We carry on... but now; we're taking two or three steps at a time...

In funding the best research in Australia, I see huge opportunities to bring together government, business, philanthropists and the wider community. Together, we can develop research into early diagnostics, safe treatments, supportive care, better quality survivor-ships and ultimately - prevention. It just takes a lot of dollars and a lot of time - and both are in short supply.

Giving in Australia, a report published by the Prime Ministers Community Business Partnership, estimated that of the annual \$11 billion donated to the community sector - less than 30% is from our corporate sector. This surprised me but, only reiterates the power of the individual.

In Australia, we have our infamous "Tall poppy syndrome". This should never apply to a charitable donation - we must encourage those who give to research to do so - more publicly. Lady Mary Fairfax, in donating \$1 million to the NBCF said, "If you show leadership - others will follow".

We need many more Lady Marys - not just individuals - corporate Australians - especially corporate Australia.

What I have outlined today can never be the sole domain of NBCF, nor of any single group; the essential resources are beyond one single sector. It

requires the community, business and government to sit together and develop strong coordinated strategies and implementation partnerships. We must combine and expand our investment of time, talent, and most importantly, dollars.

Today, I have talked about Breast Cancers of yesterday, today and all our tomorrows.

Our future holds our biggest Challenges

Looking into our future, people living with cancer - around the world and here in Australia - are growing in numbers - every year.

Over and above the physical, social and emotional impacts, we see increasing economic pains. Recently, the Cancer Council of NSW reported that a single diagnosis of cancer will cost the patient - \$47,000.

That's nearly \$50 grand, per patient, per household over the first few years. And it goes on ...

This is a new and critical concept, one I have not heard before.

It raises more questions - and so did I which prompted me to talk to some of your colleagues.

Last week, I called three journalists - from different media - and asked them what they thought. I asked what were the "most vital questions" that they could ask of Breast Cancer research today. While I am looking forward to questions later I thought I would share with you their questions:

1. Juanita Phillips, from the ABC , asked me-

Breast Cancer research is a high-profile cause and attracts many millions of dollars in funding and donations. Can we see any direct results from that funding in terms of treatment and survival rates?

This booklet is a complete record of our research funding. We believe in making available to everyone exactly where your Pink Dollars end up. This book is very well researched, thoughtfully prepared, and is available on our website - free ... I am extremely proud of NBCF's performance and contribution to Australian Breast Cancer research. Today brings an extra privilege in launching "Achievements in Breast Cancer Research - learning from the past informing the future".

2. Alan Jones from 2GB, fresh from his own brush with cancer asked me – “Are women as guilty as men in early detection and diagnosis? To what extent should we stop being our own doctor and, even if there are no warning signs, get regular checks?”

If we can make early detection easier, cheaper, simpler – more men and more women will get tested sooner and while younger. I can’t reiterate enough the importance of early diagnosis. We cannot leave something until later if we think it will bring bad news. With earlier methods of detection we can get early treatments that save lives and let us live longer. I think, the one thing that would make things more certain, sooner, is the breath tester, and for blokes...of course one with lots of extra function buttons and, of course... cordless...!!!

- 3 Deb Thomas from Australian Women’s Weekly asked for my thoughts on how we can provide equitable access and support for country patients who face the additional burdens of isolation and tyranny of distance?

It’s important that women are in the care of doctors who treat breast cancer regularly.

We know access to multi-disciplinary teams results in better treatment.

So, we need to ensure innovative technologies such as digitised mammography and telemedicine are available for diagnosis, treatment options and follow-up care to women in regional and isolated areas.

These women also need ready and reliable access to the internet to link with others in similar circumstances.

Finally in closing - in Australia we really are punching well above our weight in research. Our rate of publication per capita is higher than that of other countries.

And so, October is Breast Cancer Month.

Our time to focus on the importance of increasing research and the increasing need for vital funds to decrease the impact of breast cancer in our community.

All through the month, there will be thousands of pink breakfasts.

Across the nation, buildings will be lit pink and dedicated researchers will be hard at work.

Then on October 27th, we have our big National Pink Ribbon Day - you will see millions of Pink ribbons - everywhere - and every one will have a story.

As I look forward to my next invitation to the Press Club, my greatest wish will be to announce that, "We are beating this insidious disease". But to do that, we need to take three or four big steps at a time; we need to be funding more research to get there.

Across Australia and across the globe, we're on a mission to finish the work that Hippocrates started.

Thank you for Thinking Pink...