

Giving Insight



SPRING 2023

ST JOHN OF GOD FOUNDATION Special Impact Report

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ST JOHN OF GOD
Foundation

Transforming health care for **humanity**



What's on your mind?

A quick-fire Q&A with our CEO, Bianca Pietralla

Q. Looking back over the last financial year, what were your biggest highlights?

A: I was truly moved by the response to our Christmas Wish Appeal, through which we raised funds to fulfil the final wishes of patients in palliative care, and create special memories for them and their families.

I want to sincerely thank our supporters for their amazing contributions over the last year - in total, philanthropic support over the past financial year has enabled us to raise \$3.14 million to continue to bring advanced treatments and personalised, compassionate care to patients and clients across the country. For everything you do, I am truly grateful.

Q. What's coming up for St John of God Foundation?

A. The men and women who have served in our defence forces and first responders in police, fire, ambulance and emergency services, sacrifice a great deal to protect us. Sadly, through their line of work, they suffer from mental health trauma at a much higher rate than the general population. St John of God Health Care is a pioneer in the field of service-

related trauma and delivers these incredible services, currently out of our two NSW based hospitals. The Foundation will support this important work, in response to unmet needs within the community, and at a time when the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide is prompting urgent action from Government.

St John of God Subiaco Hospital in WA is also undergoing a major redevelopment, that is in advanced planning stages. The Foundation will continue to play an important role in enabling a world-class private hospital to help meet the needs of Western Australians in areas such as cardiac care, maternity and neonatal care, comprehensive cancer care, advanced surgery and leading medical research.

Aligned to the role of the Foundation since its inception in 1994, we are privileged to support the communities served by our hospitals and services in WA, NSW and VIC, facilitating generous contributions from individuals, community groups and businesses to fuel excellence and innovation in patient care and medical research.

Q. Who is someone you admire?

A. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to attend pilgrimage and learn more about the life of John of God, the patron saint who inspired the Sisters and Brothers of St John of God, and continues to inspire the work of our hospitals and services today.

St John of God and the early brothers became so well known for helping the poor and sick, that the community got behind him and funded the first hospital in Granada, Spain. I admire John's dedication and selflessness, and feel so proud that the St John of God Health Care we know today is built on this rich legacy of hospitality, compassion and giving.

Q. What is something (or someone!) you're grateful for?

A. My beautiful family – being a mum has taught me so much about myself, and my two daughters bring me so much joy and laughter.

Do you have a question for Bianca?

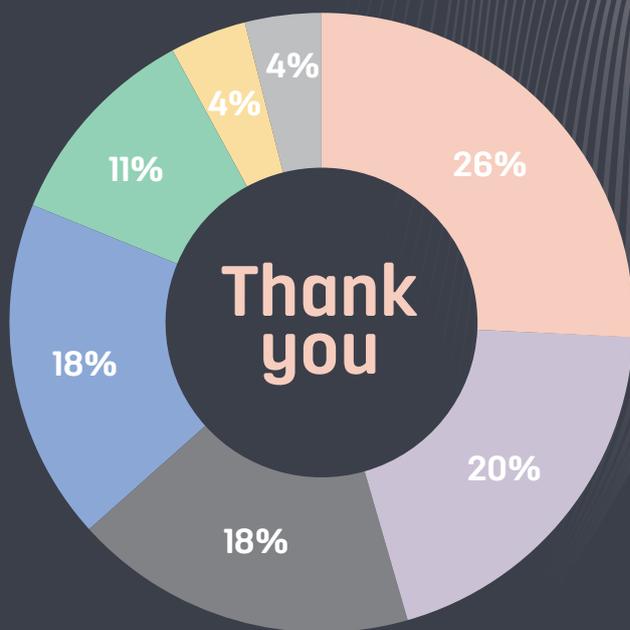
Please write to us at Foundation@sjog.org.au and your question could be featured in the next edition of Giving Insight!

You brought hope when it was needed the most

FY23 donation snapshot –
the life-changing impact of
your generosity at a glance

You have helped to support...

- Area of greatest need
- Innovative medical equipment
- Medical and health research
- Clinical services
- Patient support
- Expanded hospital services
- Community services



Your generosity has helped to support:



New specialist
nursing positions



New surgical
equipment and
medical technology



Gifts of Hope
for cancer
patients



Cancer wellbeing
and support
programs



Compassionate
support for
palliative patients



And more



\$400k
in research
funding



**27 caregiver
scholarships**
across 12 hospitals
and services

Thank you
for helping
us to raise
\$3.14M
in 2022-23



▶ The Gorrie family (pictured centre) met with caregivers at Geelong for the commissioning of the new Cuddle Bed made possible through their generous donation

Why We Give

Making a donation can be a deeply personal gesture, and we truly appreciate when donors choose to share their stories. The Gorrie family of Portland spoke with us about the inspiration behind their decision to give.

Danny Gorrie was cherished and adored by his family - including his dad David, mum Julie, and his sisters Lauren and Kendl. He was also a patient at St John of God Geelong Hospital from 20th June 2021 until he sadly passed away on 22nd August of the same year, aged 42.

Throughout the months of Danny's care at the hospital, the dedicated doctors, caregivers and environmental services teams, on both Ward 2 North and Ward 3 North, formed a strong bond with the Gorrie family.

"It was our absolute privilege to care for Danny, and perhaps our greatest privilege of all to be with him right until the end. It was most definitely our greatest fortune that it was here," said Danny's sister Lauren of their time together in the hospital.

Danny lived with disability and had extensive support needs. It was the extraordinary care and respect shown to Danny during his time in hospital that inspired the Gorrie family to make a gift to honour his memory.

"We are sure this donation will complement the outstanding care that is provided here every day, and support families into the future to experience the privilege of being together," said Kendl.

The amazing generosity of the Gorrie family has enabled St John of God Geelong Hospital to purchase a Cuddle Bed. A Cuddle Bed is a special hospital bed that can be converted to support two or more people and help to remove physical barriers during end of life care, giving intimate connection and comfort to critically ill patients and their loved ones.

▼ Danny Gorrie and his sisters, Lauren and Kendl.



▼ David and Julie Gorrie



These simple yet profoundly impactful beds allow families to be as close as possible, and lay together during the precious last days of their loved one's life.

The new Cuddle Bed is now in place in Danny's patient room at the hospital, where the Gorrie family hopes it will help families like theirs.

We are so grateful to the Gorrie family for their immense generosity and compassion for patients and their families, and thank them for choosing to honour Danny's memory with a gift to their local hospital.

Pictured: Ashlee Freeburn, ▶
McCusker IBD Clinical Nurse
Specialist

Donor funding creates specialist nurse position at St John of God Murdoch Hospital



Thanks to a generous philanthropic commitment from the McCusker Charitable Foundation, a Clinical Nurse Specialist position has been established at St John of God Murdoch Hospital to support patients with Inflammatory Bowel Diseases (IBD).

IBD affects approximately 1 in 250 Australians, and prevalence and severity of the diseases are increasing. Patients often require life-long immunosuppressive medications, and a significant number also require surgery at least once in their lifetime.

Due to the increasing complexity of managing these chronic diseases, it is almost impossible for a gastroenterologist alone to provide the support that is required to people with IBD. There is a constant need to respond to issues that arise in this vulnerable group of patients, and this newly-created nurse role provides an opportunity to improve service delivery and patient experience at St John of God

Murdoch Hospital and in the local community.

Dr Oliver Waters, Gastroenterologist at St John of God Health Care, believes the specialist nurse will help patients to more easily navigate the complex treatment journey, access therapies sooner, and therefore achieve better health outcomes.

"Unfortunately, many IBD patients currently do not have appropriate access to effective and proven therapies. An IBD clinical nurse is a significant step towards solving this problem and will provide the ongoing support that patients desperately require," said Dr Waters.

St John of God Foundation CEO Bianca Pietralla said the impact of the McCusker Charitable Foundation's gift will be felt by many WA families.

"It's a life-long journey for IBD patients from diagnosis, through to treatment, and the ongoing management of symptoms in

their day-to-day lives," said Bianca.

"This crucial position will act as a bridge that links patients and their treatments, and make a real difference to the lives of so many families. We are so grateful to the McCusker Charitable Foundation for their generosity and compassion for patients living with IBD."

Following a competitive recruitment process, St John of God Murdoch Hospital has appointed a Clinical Nurse Specialist, Ashlee Freeburn, to the McCusker IBD Clinical Nurse Specialist position, named in honour of the family.

The role will be reviewed at the end of a 2 year pilot, with the ultimate goal of continuing to provide vital support to IBD patients and their families for years to come.



Errol's music plays on

Perth musician, husband and father Errol Tout sadly passed away last year following a 10-year battle with cancer. But his legacy, and his music, will live on - thanks to those who knew and loved him.

Errol's wife Sandie recalls when he was first diagnosed with renal cell carcinoma in 2012. He had to have surgery to remove a 2 kilogram tumour from his kidneys, followed by months of chemotherapy. At the time, Errol and Sandie were advised to start looking into palliative care – doctors said there was nothing more they could do.

Errol and Sandie decided to seek a second opinion, and fortunately found an oncologist that was willing to help them – which was how they found themselves at St John of God Subiaco Hospital.

Over the years that followed, Errol spent a lot of time at Subiaco. He received immunotherapy at the Ivy Suite and spent time in 'nearly every ward' at the hospital, according to Sandie. During this time, Errol and Sandie found all of the nurses and caregivers they encountered at the hospital to be lovely.

"Errol and I were so lucky to have met all these people," Sandie reflected.

Most of all, Sandie remembers their time at Ward 35.

"The doctors and the nurses, everybody there, was so lovely, caring and calm," Sandie said.

Errol and his family built a strong bond with caregivers on the ward, especially due to Errol's gregarious nature and love of jokes. Sandie says that seeing friendly faces on the ward was reassuring during difficult times.

"Just seeing a smiling face when we'd come in, or hearing the nurses greet him, "Hi Errol!" – it was just really lovely. They made a hard journey easier."

Errol and Sandie, pictured on the day of his 100th immunotherapy treatment.

Errol was a prolific and talented guitarist, and he continued recording and performing music throughout his cancer battle. His final album, *Small Window, Large View*, was released posthumously, and a launch event organised by his son Sam brought friends, family and collaborators together to celebrate Errol's life and legacy. The concert was sold out, and Sam and many of Errol's friends performed songs from the album, taking turns to play Errol's lead guitar parts.

After their experience at Ward 35, Sam and Sandie decided to give funds from the album launch, as well as donations from loved ones, back to the hospital, to help families like theirs. Knowing firsthand the many, many hours that can be spent at a loved one's bedside, Sam and Sandie requested that funds be used to purchase comfortable chairs for families to use while sitting with loved ones in hospital for extended periods of time.

We're so grateful to Sam, Sandie, and all those who knew and loved Errol, for their generous support. Their kindness and compassion will help bring comfort to countless families in their time of need.





“There is no better feeling”

St John of God caregivers come together to help young mums

Caregiver donors across St John of God Health Care make a difference each and every day, not only through their work, but also by generously giving in support of compassionate patient and client care – many through the St John of God Health Care Workplace Giving program.

St John of God Mount Lawley Hospital caregivers have come together to support the St John of God Horizon House Young Mother and Baby Program in Perth, which provides expectant and new mothers who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness with safe, stable accommodation and support to develop essential life and parenting skills and transition to independent living. Amazingly, since 2020 this special group of caregivers have raised over \$11,000 for the program through Workplace Giving.

The donations are used to purchase ‘home-starter’ packs for mums moving into a place of their own and include household essentials like bedding, kitchen appliances, pantry staples and more.

Sharon Collins, St John of God Horizon House Support Coordinator, says the caregiver donations are incredibly meaningful for the young mums both financially and emotionally.

“The home-starter packs not only reduce financial stress for our mums, but act as a meaningful display of support, showing our confidence in the mums as they take this important step to building the life they want,” Sharon said.

“It’s incredibly meaningful for the young mums to know there are people in our organisation who want to help them succeed. People they’ve never met are cheering them on and that has a real impact on our young mums’ confidence.”

It’s a win-win for caregiver donors who say they feel privileged to be able to provide support.



There is no better feeling than helping others and knowing you are helping to make a life-changing difference for someone in need,” one caregiver explained.

“A small donation from your pay each fortnight is barely missed, but it makes a tremendous difference to the lives of these young mums when we all contribute to this fantastic cause.”



Teletthon funding for vulnerable infants and families

Last year, St John of God Subiaco and Murdoch Hospitals welcomed almost 5,000 babies into the world, of which 924 were treated in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) or Special Care Nursery. Thanks to the generosity of the Channel 7 Teletthon Trust, our caregivers will be able to provide the very best care for these vulnerable babies and their families.

For the first time this year, St John of God Foundation was awarded a grant from the Channel 7 Teletthon Trust, which will directly help families in the NICU and Special Care Nursery at both Murdoch and Subiaco, through the purchase of 'Angel Eyes' camera systems.

The Angel Eyes camera system provides live video streaming from NICU and Special Care Nursery cots, allowing parents and other family members to watch their vulnerable infants in real time, no matter where they are located.

"For families of newborn babies whose first few days, weeks or even months are spent in the NICU or Special Care Nursery, the joy of their baby's arrival can be tempered by the anxieties brought on by separation and the strain of managing visits," says Bianca Pietralla, CEO St John of God Foundation.

"The Angel Eyes camera system can help to bring comfort and connection to families during this challenging time, and is the very definition of the compassionate care that we pride ourselves on at St John of God Health Care."

During long stays, parents will often stay with their vulnerable infants for as many hours as they can, which can cause distress for other family members and reduce the opportunity for mothers to heal after childbirth. This Angel Eyes camera system is a simple and secure solution that provides reassurance, reduces anxiety and allows parents to feel more connected and involved in the care of their newborn.

At the Leeuwin Lunch for Telethon in May, generous donors at the event supported the purchase of a Fetal Monitoring Machine for Subiaco, and a baby ventilator for Murdoch.

The fetal monitoring machine is used for monitoring women in labour, allowing greater mobility and a less restricted experience, and enabling mums to assume positions of comfort in labour. The machine will enable caregivers to deliver safer care and provide a better patient experience.

"We are very thankful to Telethon for the gift of our new telemetry fetal monitor," says Joan Cunningham, Clinical Nurse Manager at St John of God Subiaco Hospital.

"This monitor allows for birthing women who wish to remain mobile during their labour to do so, while their midwife can continuously monitor the wellbeing of their unborn baby. Having telemetry ensures that the midwives working in the birthing suite can support and facilitate the wishes of the birthing mothers and give them the birthing experience they desire."

The new ventilator will offer vital temporary ventilation for babies born with critical, life threatening conditions, while they wait

for emergency transport to take them to a specialist neonatal care facility. Having access to this equipment at St John of God Murdoch Hospital will help improve outcomes for neonatal babies and give them the best possible fighting chance.

"The addition of this new state-of-the-art ventilator to the neonatal unit at SJOG Murdoch will ensure we are providing the best evidence based care to our babies," said Sarah Sheehan, Clinical Midwifery Specialist St John of God Murdoch Hospital.

"It will allow us to provide high level oxygen requirements for pre-term babies prior to transfer, ensuring better long-term outcomes. The entire neonatal medical team, nurses and midwives on St Mary's ward are excited for the arrival of the new ventilator and looking forward to the education and training."

These amazing new technologies will help countless WA families during the precious first days of their baby's life, and we are very grateful to the Channel 7 Telethon Trust for their support.

▼ *Thanks to generous funding from the Channel 7 Telethon Trust, caregivers at our Murdoch and Subiaco hospitals will be able to provide the very best care to new babies*





Precious moments with lost little ones

Cuddle Cots in Ballarat and Mount Lawley will provide compassionate support for families experiencing the devastating loss of an infant

The loss of a child is something no family should ever have to face. Tragically, for some families, it is a reality.

Thanks to Bears of Hope, our St John of God Mount Lawley and Ballarat Hospitals will be able to provide further compassionate support to parents as they face this unimaginable loss, by ensuring cuddle cots are available to bereaved families.

A cuddle cot is a cooling system that has been designed to fit within a small cot and lies beneath the infant. This can be an invaluable support resource for families experiencing the loss of their baby, as it enables families to spend additional time with their child, and to create special memories that they will cherish forever. Spending as much uninterrupted time as they need, without the worry or distress of needing to hand their baby back to

hospital staff, is a gift for families before saying their final goodbye.

Some families who have lost babies of their own opt to donate cuddle cots back to hospitals through Bears of Hope.

"While our dream is that families never experience infant loss, it is a devastating reality for some," said Emma Cook, Director of Nursing & Midwifery, St John of God Mt Lawley Hospital.

"Cuddle cots give the blessing of time, allowing grieving families to spend precious moments with their infant, creating memories and supporting the grieving process."

"We are so grateful to the families for this generous donation and know this gift of time will be cherished by those who need it most."

Thank you to Bears of Hope for facilitating this truly special donation.

Why Sarah decided to Run for a Reason

Pictured: Caregiver Sarah Negus celebrating after smashing her HBF Run for a Reason goals ▶



On Sunday 21st May, thousands of Western Australians descended on Perth's CBD to take part in the 2023 HBF Run for a Reason.

Among the runners was St John of God Subiaco Hospital caregiver Sarah Negus, who had been training for months with two goals in mind: to run 12km without stopping (something she had never done before), and to raise funds in support of free and low-cost mental health services in her community.

"The reason for me wanting to do this, besides the personal challenge, is raising money for St John of God Foundation," Sarah said.

All donations received through St John of God Foundation for this year's event will help WA people in need to access high-quality, cost-free mental wellbeing care, and emotional support through pregnancy and into adulthood through perinatal mental health services.

It is something that Sarah feels passionate about.

"Everyone should be able to access these services. It's really important for everyone to be able to see a psychologist, particularly after COVID-19," she said.

"I think there's still quite a stigma around reaching out for that help. It should be available for all; everyone should be able to take it and not be ashamed of reaching out for that help."

Sarah, a Clinical Trials Liaison Officer who has been a caregiver for over two years (including

stints at our Mount Lawley and Subiaco Hospitals), is also passionate about giving back.

"I think the organisation's values are wonderful. I love that we are a not-for-profit and that we are encouraged to give back to the community as much as we can," she said.

Sarah was pleasantly surprised by the support of her friends and family when it came to her fundraising, and ended up raising well over her \$500 goal.

"I've told everyone my goal: so if they want to support a great cause, but also watch me suffer, then go for it!"

Thanks to people like Sarah, nearly \$3000 in donations were received for St John of God Health Care's community mental health services this year. Our sincere thanks to every walker, runner and roller who chose to go the distance for people in need – you have all made an amazing difference for our community.

To fundraise in support of patients, clients and their families, contact us on 1800 281 288 or email Foundation@sjog.org.au ❤️

The power of your compassion for patients in palliative care

For caregivers like Casey, it can be an honour and privilege to walk alongside patients with life-limiting illness and their families, and to be welcomed into their life at such a pivotal time.

"As a caregiver at St John of God Health Care, I am lucky enough to be able to provide compassion, kindness and respect to our patients and their loved ones," says Casey.

"I love that we are able to look after the person as a whole, encompassing the patients' physical, psychosocial & spiritual needs, as well as caring for their family as a unit. It is rewarding to know that we can make a big difference to someone's wellbeing."

Hospital resources can cover essential clinical and psychological needs of palliative patients and their families, but we can always do more to help bring

them comfort and connection in their time of need.

Over the past financial year, our generous community of donors have shown an outstanding level of support for patients in palliative care and their families.

Our goal is to maximise palliative care wellbeing and comfort to the best of our ability, creating a 'home away from home' atmosphere.

Caregivers who have been privileged to support patients and loved ones on their palliative care journey have rallied behind our fundraising efforts, putting forward a range of ideas to benefit both

current and future patients.

Specialised chairs to allow patients to spend the maximum amount of time out of bed with their families and friends, multifunction digital radios and speakers for patients and their loved ones to share in their favourite music together, and rolling out a 'Dream a Little Dream' program for granting final wishes are just some of the beautiful initiatives donors like you can help to make possible.

To donate or find out more, contact us on 1800 281 288 or visit www.sjogfoundation.org.au/palliativecare

Bringing hope when it is needed the most

Imagine being diagnosed with a life-threatening condition like cancer, and not being able to access the best treatment for your disease.

New medical discoveries, including drugs and specialised equipment, can help patients to live longer and experience less pain or other debilitating symptoms.

However, these new treatments can often be costly and out of reach of many Australians. If treatments are not covered under Medicare, health insurance or pharmaceutical benefits schemes, patients and their families may have the option to cover these costs themselves - but this can really add up.

A Gift of Hope is a gift of financial support provided to

in-need Australians with life-threatening conditions such as cancer. For people who are struggling to afford the best treatment for their cancer, a donor-funded Gift of Hope can be life-changing.

People like Chrissie*, a patient at St John of God Berwick Hospital. Thanks to support from our generous community, Chrissie has been able to receive life-changing immunotherapy treatment through a Gift of Hope.

Chrissie's oncologist identified that for her specific type of cancer, the addition of immunotherapy to her treatment plan, which already included standard chemotherapy, could have a significant benefit and increase her chances of survival.

** Not her real name*

The Gift of Hope made immunotherapy treatment affordable for Chrissie.

"The impact on Chrissie has been remarkable," says Dr Cameron McLaren, Oncologist, St John of God Health Care.

"The benefit to her morale by such a tangible act of support has been immeasurable."

Find out more and support Gifts of Hope at www.sjogfoundation.org.au/hope



Dennis (pictured left) and his beloved late husband Peter. ▶

Giving back in gratitude to honour Peter's memory



Dennis' beloved husband Peter was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in early 2017, and over the next four years, they spent a lot of their time at St John of God Subiaco Hospital.

"Throughout the four years and many stints in the hospital, we were very impressed with the caregivers. From the nurses on the ward right down to those who delivered the meals. Everyone was compassionate, understanding and very respectful of our needs," said Dennis of their experience.

"We definitely felt we were heard and respected, that we mattered and nothing was insurmountable. The fact we were a married same sex couple did not impact the level of care we received.

"It felt like we were front and centre in everything they did."

While Peter was in hospital, he and Dennis heard from the nurses that they were putting together a team for that year's HBF Run for a Reason event.

"We thought 'what a great idea', we should join the team and walk as well (as we definitely had a reason), and maybe raise some funds to help the Foundation." Dennis said.

The response from Dennis' and Peter's loved ones was immense.

"We sent out a generic email to our friends and family who knew about Peter's diagnosis. We were very overwhelmed by the response, with donations coming from overseas even.

"Our reason for supporting the nurses on the ward and joining their team was the amazing compassion and support they gave to Peter and myself during our numerous stays."

Peter sadly passed away in April 2021 in hospital. Dennis remembers with gratitude the compassion shown by Subiaco caregivers during this difficult time.

"I have a clear memory of when the end was near. I was sitting next to Peter reading my book. The room was calm and very still. A nurse was quietly checking his vitals. Suddenly Peter's breathing slowed completely. I looked up from my book and thought 'Oh dear, is this it'. The nurse walked up to me and whispered, 'It's not long now' and very quietly left the room."

"She gave me the space and time to be with Peter in his last moments. I'll never forget her actions to allow me to spend those last precious minutes alone with Peter."

After Peter's passing, donations continued to pour in, with loved ones opting to donate to honour his memory in lieu of sending flowers.

Dennis hopes that the funds raised will go towards continuing to provide the high level of care that he and Peter received.

"I hope the donations will not only go towards better equipment, but better care. Every person is different and has different needs," he said.

"I hope the funds will help to maintain and increase the level of care to patients going through what is a very difficult time in their lives – no matter the outcome."

▶ Peter and Dennis decided to give back to their local hospital in gratitude for the compassionate care they had received.



Donor-funded therapy a game changer

Thanks to generous donor support, a group therapy program has been established at St John of God Murdoch Hospital's Cancer Centre, to support people experiencing spiritual distress.

After 42 happy years of marriage and with their children all grown up, Heather and Steve Head were both retired and looking forward to a long-awaited caravanning holiday. They were forced to put their plans on hold, however, while Steve went through treatment for prostate cancer, and then also had to have open-heart surgery.

Thankfully, he was later given the all clear and things were starting to settle down. But then out of the blue, Heather was diagnosed with bowel cancer.

"To say I was gob smacked would be a gross understatement!" says Heather.

Before she retired, Heather was an inpatient physiotherapist, but her experience with clinical situations didn't make what came next any less frightening.

"The next few days were taken up with scans and surgeon appointments. I found it was all quite overwhelming, and the speed with which I had been booked in for scans and to see the surgeon was initially quite scary. I thought that they were hurrying everything because it was so serious – my professionally clinical brain was in overdrive."

Heather's family were also struggling with the shock and distress that can come with having a loved one diagnosed with cancer.

"When Heather was diagnosed, it initially knocked me a lot," says Steve.

"I think the kids were more affected than we were, the threat of losing their mother was overwhelming. But we were not going to accept anything other than a complete recovery."

Heather found she was able to take a pragmatic yet positive approach to her treatment, and even nicknamed her cancer

'The Slug' due to how it appeared on her colonoscopy. Thankfully, Heather's surgery and hospital care went very smoothly, and even when cancer cells were found on one of her lymph nodes, Heather rationalised that it was only one of the nodes that had 'Slug cells'.

Then Heather commenced chemotherapy at the St John of God Murdoch Hospital Cancer Centre, and it was during this treatment that she began to feel overwhelmed again.

"Chemotherapy is extremely draining, and everyone reacts differently. By the time of disconnection of the 5th cycle, the nausea and other side-effects had overwhelmed me, again, and I broke down in the Centre," she says.

Fortunately, the Cancer Centre staff were equipped to support Heather.

"The Nurse Manager who was treating me at that time immediately swung into action. She strongly recommended that Steve and I join the Group Therapy sessions which were due to commence the following week."

This was, Heather says, *"The best advice ever!"*

Thanks to generous donor support, a group therapy program has been established at the Murdoch Cancer Centre, for self-nominated patients and carers who have reported spiritual distress.

Spiritual distress is experienced by many patients and their carers following a cancer diagnosis. The condition can be all-consuming and difficult to articulate for the people experiencing it, and is known to cause feelings of alienation, helplessness, and hopelessness.

The group therapy program forms part of a spiritual distress study led by Professor Leanne

Monterosso at St John of God Murdoch Hospital, and the outcomes of the study will support the future vision for the program to be available for cancer patients and their carers across St John of God Hospitals and Services.

For Heather, the group therapy program had a positive impact almost right away.

"As with many of the other participants, I was a little hesitant at first, but both Farrah and Beth [the facilitators] were able to effortlessly draw everyone out of their shells, resulting in multitudes of shared experiences and tips for dealing with many of the different aspects of the cancer journey," she says.

"For me personally, the breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, thought and feelings charting, and meditation techniques were extremely helpful. There was plenty of time to socialise before and after each session which I felt benefited everyone in the group.

Although he was initially apprehensive, Steve also found the group therapy to be extremely beneficial.

"I did not think this group would help, especially since I was not the patient. I thought I knew it all," he says.

"How wrong I was... We discussed many of life's conundrums and different approaches, we all had many ideas and views, all of which were extremely valuable. We have found a bunch of new friends, some of which we have seen outside the group."

Now, Steve says that he feels that the group therapy program was one of the most beneficial aspects of the whole experience for himself and for Heather.

"These sessions have affected the way I view the world, I know this sounds a bit crazy, but it is how I feel."

Heather feels grateful to the donors who have made the program possible.

"Their generosity has enabled this program to provide the much needed support for both patients and carers at the time they need it most. For this I am forever grateful."

With treatment out of the way, Heather and Steve are looking to the future – and Heather feels skills they've learnt in group therapy will help with whatever comes next.

"With the cyclical nature of the treatment, it's inevitable that both patients and carers have physical and mental ups and downs along the way," says Heather.

"I feel that because this was dealt with so well in the group, I am able to keep practicing the tools used in the group to manage these changes. That doesn't mean I don't experience them, just that now I can recognise them for what they are and deal with them far more efficiently and effectively. This has been such an immense help in encouraging us to once again start planning that elusive caravan trip..."

We are incredibly thankful for the generous donor support that will enable St John of God Murdoch Hospital to continue to offer this important program to people like Heather and Steve, and to support them on their cancer journey.

▼ Pictured: Heather and Steve Head



Your legacy. Their future.

If you would like to know more about how leaving a gift in your Will can create a life-changing health care legacy for future generations, for a confidential discussion please contact:

Preema Wong

T: 0427 526 899

E: Preema.Wong@sjog.org.au



Your kindness is amazing

Scan here or visit our website to donate today:
www.sjogfoundation.org.au/donate



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