

ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
**OPENING ADDRESS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND CHILDREN'S
HAEMATOLOGY/ONCOLOGY GROUP'S ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC MEETING**
SHERATON ON THE PARK, SYDNEY
1 SEPTEMBER 2010

Ladies and gentlemen, I am really delighted to join you here this morning for the opening session of your Annual Scientific Meeting, and I extend a very warm welcome to your overseas speakers and delegates.

Despite the relative ease of travel and communications these days, leaving our work and families for extended periods remains a juggle for men and women.

However, the rewards of coming together with colleagues from across the nation and world are too compelling:

the opportunities and solutions that collaboration brings
and the enduring value of collegialism.

One of the privileges of my role is seeing, first hand:

the extraordinary depth and diversity of talent and skill in this country

Australians working locally and internationally

all of you here - experts at the frontier and coal face of your disciplines

the partnerships you built over many years

and the spirit of generosity and cooperation you bring to your regular exchanges with one another.

Friends, I come here
in awe of your capacity

to do what you do so intensely and rigorously every day

and then in this forum to 'down tools' and engage at so many levels, with the vast range of issues and considerations surrounding the treatment and healing of childhood cancers and blood diseases:

the scientific and clinical research

the trialled and the untriated

the ethical and humanitarian issues

and the pragmatic, compassionate approaches that are essential to the effective daily care of young patients and their families.

Despite the incidence rates for most childhood cancers stabilising over the last 15 years,
and despite lowering mortality rates,
your task remains extraordinarily complex.
There is still a great deal more to be understood about the causes of these diseases, and their long term
effects

in the lives of survivors,
due either to their pathology or their treatment.

And there are, it seems, to be some perplexing discrepancies in the data as between genders and certain
age groups.

For all the power and magic of the human body, there is ample irony in its workings too.

What is designed for our survival can, now and then, deal a lethal blow.

Our lymphatic system that is critical to preventing and fighting disease
can become the channel for transporting malignancies to our organs.

The youthful, flexible, resilient bodies of our children - bulwarks against illness
and accident -
can instead be usurped and overtaken.

The garden-variety wisdom we rely on for how things ought to work most of the time is uprooted and
tossed on its top.

And the fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers without the benefit of your knowing, fumble around
for a foothold while hugging tight to the one they love.
But in time they do get the benefit of your knowing, and - as important - your caring; and I've found
that it is a special kind of both.

There is that feeling of relief and joy as a parent

no matter how bad things are

that one's child is in the hands and hearts of people who know they're precious

uniquely precious

for all that they are, and all that they deserve to become
no matter how many little ones demand your care.

Yours is a different profession.

You have a different makeup.

Last week, I was speaking at the Children's Book Council Awards, trying to find words for what our
children's authors and illustrators do for our kids.

Yes, they teach and transport and transfix - and there were all those familiar lines about disappearing
through wardrobes and guzzling Turkish Delight.

And yes, you treat and heal,
and quite honestly, perform what the ordinary among us would regard as magic.

But there is an ability you both have

to be present in each moment of the lives of young people

that makes them almost a part of you

and gives you an innate sense of what they need

what makes them laugh and cry

and the remarkable stuff that keeps them going against all odds.

I've seen it at Westmead,

I've seen it in hospitals around the country,

I saw it when our son Tom went in and out of the Royal Children's in Brisbane as a very sick little boy.

He's an ongoing experiment our Tom.

Goodness knows the body of work that has combined to keep him going.

And his haematologist, Harry Smith,

is still on his case.

In a lifetime, it is a rare thing to witness such teamwork, such dedication, such compassion for children and their wellbeing.

But friends, I know that this is your every day.

And on behalf of Australians who know

and those who will never know,

I thank you,

and I express my deep admiration for:

your work

your expertise

your curiosity and courage in all your endeavours to explain and alleviate suffering in young lives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

members and colleagues of the Australian and New Zealand Children's Haematology/Oncology Group

it is my pleasure this morning to open your annual scientific meeting.

I give you my greatest support in your discussions over the coming days.