



An open letter
to surgeons and
their families
from Michael and
Sally McAuliffe

WHEN 'SORRY YOU HAVE CANCER' HITS HOME

On any given day in Australia, 300 people will hear the phrase, "Sorry, you have cancer."

Many of them will be told by surgeons. For many of you this is a phrase you say to patients; it is not one you think you will ever personally hear. Certainly, with a young family, you never believe you will hear, "Sorry, your two-year-old son has cancer."

In 2005 Michael was undertaking an orthopaedic Fellowship in Auckland. Life was fabulous with two gorgeous children and another on-the-way.

One day our son Conor complained of a 'sore tummy'. Michael felt an enlarged liver and the next day an ultrasound revealed he had liver cancer. We desperately hoped he 'only had localised liver cancer', but the CT scan revealed metastatic hepatoblastoma.

Our world changed. One day we had an active happy two-year-old, the next we were told he had a 50 per cent chance of survival.

Conor had 15 months of treatment at

the Royal Children's Hospital in Brisbane, involving many rounds of chemotherapy, countless hospital admissions, numerous CT and MRI scans and multiple operations including removal of 70 per cent of his liver.

He did all this with the cutest smile on his face and he was always incredibly brave. Sadly, he was not one of the lucky ones and in July 2006, aged three, our beautiful son died leaving a hole in our hearts and a suffering so intense that no parents ever imagine will happen to them.

It is our personal journey and it is our direct involvement with both the Foundation for Surgery and philanthropic cycling organisation, Tour de Cure that makes us proud to announce a new collaboration between the two groups.

Through the combined expertise of the Foundation for Surgery and the dynamic and driven team at Tour de Cure, the intention of the collaboration is to establish a perpetual cancer research scholarship.

To enable this, Tour de Cure has

committed to fund an annual surgical grant, administered through the College, to advance a cure for cancer.

Tour de Cure is a highly successful and professionally managed organisation that, since its establishment in 2007, has expanded its annual calendar of fundraising activities from a 1500km 10-day Signature Tour to hosting four-day country tours in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, partnering with Iron Man Melbourne and other major corporate events.

So far this dedicated team has funded 137 cancer research, support and prevention projects and carries the 'Be Fit, Be Healthy, Be Happy' educational message to schools in the towns they cycle through.

Projects they have funded in past years include The Melanoma Institute of Australia's effort to identify the biomarkers that are related to the development of resistance in each patient's melanoma and understanding

the genetic and epigenetic mechanisms in Colorectal Cancer (CRC) through work at the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute in Queensland.

They have funded many other surgical projects, but it is this exciting new collaboration with the Foundation for Surgery that will help them access the full breadth and depth of surgical expertise in Australasia.

Since 2011, in memory of our son Connor, our family has raised more than \$120,000 to assist Tour de Cure to fund these important research projects. Much of this support has come from members of the surgical community and it is rewarding to see our family, friends and surgical colleagues support our involvement with Tour de Cure.

Being on a cycling tour with Tour de Cure is a fantastic experience that allows you to meet many wonderful riders and support crew and to hear the stories of cancer survivors, families who have lost loved ones to cancer and from those currently undergoing treatment.

It is a great reminder of the privilege and responsibility of being a doctor and a surgeon.

There is always a need for further donations to continue to support cancer research projects. Tour de Cure invites the surgical community to support this collaboration by making a donation to the Foundation for Surgery Tour de Cure Cancer Research Scholarship and to perhaps also consider becoming a rider or part of the support crew on one of their upcoming tours.

Donations can be made on the donation form in this, and each issue, of *Surgical News*. All donations are tax deductible. For more information on Tour de Cure please visit tourdecure.com.au
