



**Sharon Grierson MP
Federal Member for Newcastle**

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Ovarian Cancer

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (8.15 p.m.)—Firstly, I begin by congratulating the member for Parramatta for bringing this important motion before the House. The motion notes that Ovarian Cancer Awareness Week was held from 24 February to 2 March this year. To raise awareness during that special week, a DVD warning women of the symptoms of ovarian cancer was launched. The DVD featured our former colleague Senator Jeannie Ferris, who recorded her part of the DVD before, very sadly, she died last April after a long fight with ovarian cancer. If this DVD helps to save even one life, then it is certainly a significant addition to Senator Ferris's legacy.

Too many women, though, still die of ovarian cancer, which is often referred to as the silent cancer. Across Australia it is the sixth most common cause of cancer death in women. In the Hunter-New England region, which includes my electorate of Newcastle, the latest available figures show that 259 women were diagnosed with ovarian cancer between 2000 and 2004. In that same period, 171 women died of ovarian cancer—66 per cent of those diagnosed. The reason for that, as we know, is that women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer far too late. Regrettably, seven out of 10 women are diagnosed when the cancer is advanced and very difficult to treat. One of the reasons why we diagnose it too late is that, as my colleague the member for Parramatta mentioned, many women simply do not know the symptoms. A recent study found that more than half of women cannot correctly name any symptom of the disease. We need to turn that around. The good news, though, is that through early detection about 90 per cent can survive and be assisted, as the member for Fisher mentioned.

We need to make sure that women know what the symptoms of ovarian cancer are so that they have access to early treatment. That is why, I think, we all stand here today: to encourage women to be aware of this risk to their health. To do that, in Newcastle there is the annual Relay for Life, which raises both awareness of and funds for cancer. I have been privileged to walk in that relay several times alongside my very good friend and ovarian cancer survivor Victoria Phillis. I have also been proud to see the wonderful work of another good friend, Barbara Witcher, who leads the Newcastle Relay for Life committee in organising that event each year. Last year, the relay was in November, smack in the middle of the election campaign—but what a wonderful reminder of why we put ourselves forward and who we are serving. To walk with cancer survivors and their families was a very special reminder that we do this job to serve the people who need it most. In all of our electorates we share that responsibility. We are in a position to raise these issues here in the House, as we are doing tonight, and to push for the

direction of even more government resources towards these important issues. That is the bipartisan spirit that needs to be brought to this debate.

I am pleased to share with the House the news that recently the collaborative study between Hunter Medical Research Institute scientists in my electorate of Newcastle and their colleagues in Germany and Poland has identified four genes which were associated with a woman's likelihood of developing breast or ovarian cancer. I also note earlier research at HMRI, generously funded by Newcastle's Greater Building Society, that was successful in using a common cold virus to attack ovarian cancer cells in the test tube and in mice. I am pleased that this research is happening—and, of course, particularly proud that it is happening in my electorate of Newcastle. It is the kind of research we need to keep supporting if we are to make the advances needed in the preventions and treatment of ovarian cancer. That is the way to avoid so many deaths.

In my electorate of Newcastle cancer funding was given a big boost of an additional \$1.5 million to upgrade PET scanning facilities. There are not many PET scanners in the country, but they are a vital technology in the detection of cancer—early detection and making sure you have got it right—and in judging the stages of cancer so that the right treatments can be utilised.

It is important that all of us support the advance of cancer research and treatment and always champion raising awareness for the people we serve. I thank the member Parramatta, I congratulate the member for Fisher and commend the member for Shortland for contributing to this very important debate. I commend this private member's motion to the House.