

Daily battle with pain as Govt holds back funding

By MICHELE TYDD

FOR the first time in a 22-year battle against cancer, Keith Collins has put his pride aside and is begging for government help.

"I've worked, I've paid my taxes throughout this illness and now I feel the system is telling me I've had my share of treatment and to just go away and die," said the Unanderra father of two.

He is fighting for government funding for a new treatment that could give him a few more years to help raise his young sons.

"It sickens my wife Diane and I to see the millions wasted on carbon tax advertising when that money could help hundreds of families like ours," he said.

The rare neuroendocrine cancer consuming his body has become resistant to the radiation he has been receiving for a number of years.

He believes a newer treatment (LuTate radiation), which costs \$30,000, has been found to be highly effective against his type of cancer.

His Wollongong oncologist, Dr Amanda Glasgow, is supporting his efforts to gain access to the radiation at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute in Melbourne.

"Keith has had a long, hard battle with this malignancy and deserves any opportunity to improve his quality and duration of life," Dr Glasgow said.

"I've had patients who have had similar treatment and they've done very well."

The catch is that it falls under "user pays" treatment and the Collins' finances are depleted by more than two decades of medical bills.

"Our boys are only eight and 13 and I would like to help my wife get them at least through this difficult stage of life," Mr Collins said.

Now 53, he was diagnosed with cancer in 1988 after years of abdominal pain.

It initially responded to what is known as MIBG radiation - so well that in 1995 Mr Collins was given the all-clear.

In 2000 the cancer returned in his pelvis and he underwent two more rounds of surgery, the last which left him permanently on crutches and with excruciating pain that is managed with daily handfuls of pills.

Mr Collins said he had asked Member for Wollongong Noreen Hay to help and said he would stand outside Parliament House with protest signs if those efforts failed.

"Scans this week lit up like a Christmas tree showing I'm riddled and here I am with time just slipping away," he said. "It is incredibly frustrating to know that treatment for this type of cancer exists and we can't access it."

Mrs Collins said the strain was having an effect on the whole family, particularly her husband.

"The boys and I know his cancer is not curable but we need him around for as long as treatment allows," she added.

■ Several fundraisers have been organised for the Collins family. The next is a bowls day at Wiseman Park Bowling Club on September 3.

If you are interested in taking part, phone Renae Perry on 0417 064 005 or Mick Wheatley on 0409 608 298.



Plea: Keith Collins with wife Diane and sons Sebastian, 8, and Macalister, 13, at their Unanderra home. Mr Collins has been denied public aid to treat his rare form of cancer. Picture: MELANIE RUSSELL