

# Premier's breast cancer plea Bracks push on Herceptin

CHRIS TINKLER  
and SUELLEN HINDE

STEVE Bracks has written to Prime Minister John Howard pleading for wonder drug Herceptin to be made affordable for women in the early stages of breast cancer.

He appealed to the Federal Government to fast-track the process for the drug to be subsidised.

The drug is a potential lifeline for women with HER-2 positive breast cancer, with a study revealing it reduces the chances of the cancer returning by almost half.

Costing up to \$70,000 for a year's treatment, it is out of reach of many sufferers, as it is only subsidised — through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme — for use in the advanced stages of breast cancer.

Mr Bracks says in his letter to Mr Howard: "HER-2 positive breast cancer is a particularly aggressive form of cancer.

"It is estimated that



approximately 600 Victorian women are diagnosed with HER-2 positive breast cancer each year.

"The majority of these women cannot receive subsidised medicine as currently it is only subsidised if the person has advanced cancer.

"In some cases these Victorian families are already wrestling with the dilemma of whether they can afford the very great cost of taking Herceptin without the subsidy.

"I fully appreciate that the proper processes must be followed, both by the Therapeutic Goods Administration and the Pharmaceutical



Steve Bracks

Benefits Advisory Committee.

"I urge the Commonwealth, however, to do all that is proper to expedite consideration of the approval and PBS funding of Herceptin."

The letter comes as 9000 people are petitioning the Federal Government to "quickly" place Herceptin on the scheme.

The petition was organised by breast cancer sufferer Maree Bissel and her sister Linda Sharp.

The *Sunday Herald Sun* in November told of the women's petition and publicised their email address.

"From that story we

started getting heaps of emails from women saying they were willing to collect signatures for us," Ms Sharp said. "Some women sent back 500 signatures and others half a dozen, but it all counts."

Ms Bissel, who has HER-2 positive breast cancer, started her Herceptin treatment last week.

"Our elderly parents have had to mortgage their house to pay for Maree's treatments," Ms Sharp said.

"This has caused immense worry and concern to all family members, as selling the house was what we were hoping to use to care for our parents, who are in their 80s, if they are ever seriously ill themselves."

Australia's medicines regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration, says it will fast-track an application by Roche Products Pty Ltd to extend the use of the drug.

Ms Sharp is continuing to collect signatures. If you would like to sign the petition contact her at lsharp61@hotmail.com

'I plead with the  
Government to make  
Herceptin available  
under the PBS'



ELIZABETH'S STORY, PAGE 43

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## Policewoman stabbed, shot

MARNIE O'NEILL and  
ELLEN CONNOLLY

A MAN stabbed a policewoman and then shot her with her own gun while she worked alone at a Western Sydney police station yesterday.

A major manhunt was launched after the man, demanding to see detectives, climbed over the counter at Wetherill Park station and attacked Constable Elizabeth Roth at 6.10am.

Armed with two knives, he stabbed her in the arm and shot her in the torso after wresting away her police-issue Glock handgun as she tried to defend herself.

Constable Roth managed to escape to another part of the station and alert a highway patrol officer, who radioed for help.

The bullet fragmented and a piece lodged near her heart, but she was expected to make a full recovery after undergoing surgery last night.



Constable Roth

Senior police described her survival as a miracle. Colleague Senior Constable Kate Howse said: "She's extremely lucky."

Constable Roth, 34, joined the force two years ago and was completing an overnight shift at the station.

It is understood police protocols require stations to be closed to the public if manned by a single officer.

The NSW Government launched an inquiry amid allegations that falling

police numbers had left inexperienced officers exposed in stations.

Police Commissioner Ken Moroney said the shooting would be the subject of an independent internal review.

"The constable was in the station on her own, but there were a number of mobile crews in and around the area, plus a mobile supervisor," Mr Moroney said.

"It is a distressing time for all of my officers in the sense of seeing one of our officers shot. But it is the strength of NSW police that allows them to come together."

Heavily armed police raided a Bonnyrigg home yesterday searching for the attacker, believed to be a 32-year-old man still armed with the Glock automatic. Police helicopters also took part in the search.

Constable Roth's distraught parents travelled from Harden on the Riverina to be by her bedside at Liverpool Hospital.

## Thomas trial wait

THE jury in the trial of alleged terror suspect Joseph Terrence Thomas will move into its fourth day of deliberations today.

Thomas, 32, has pleaded not guilty in the Supreme Court to charges of

receiving funds from and supporting terror group al-Qaida.

Prosecutors allege Thomas accepted \$US3500 (\$4750) and a plane ticket to become a sleeper agent for the terror cell in Australia.

# How can we deny life-saving drugs to mothers with young children?

Young mother **Elizabeth Crosby** is locked in the fight of her life — against breast cancer. Adding pressure is the exorbitant cost of the cancer-fighting drug Herceptin, which is still not on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Elizabeth tells her story

**L**IFE has not been without its challenges for my husband and me in the past 10 years, but we thought with the birth of our first child, Grace, in April, our tables had turned.

Life was going well until our latest challenge, in November.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer when Grace was only five months old.

At 33, and after a complicated breastfeeding experience, I assumed the breast lump I had detected was nothing.

But I had a mammogram and ultrasound on my GP's recommendation. It all seemed to spiral downwards from there.

When I was told I had breast cancer, my first thoughts were "Why me?" and "It's not fair, we have had enough to deal with."

Ten years earlier my husband had had a bad car accident, leaving him with permanent disabilities.

But I took the bull by the horns and thought, "If I have breast cancer, I want to get it out of me."

So just over a week after diagnosis, I had a lumpectomy and was referred to an oncologist.

What a physical and emotional roller-coaster I have been on since. I started chemotherapy in early December and am due to start radiotherapy in early April.

It was also recommended I take Herceptin, which I started a week ago. It is not covered under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme



**Struggling:** Elizabeth Crosby, with Grace. Picture: NICKI CONNOLLY

for women in my situation — with early breast cancer — but it is covered for advanced breast cancer sufferers.

I therefore need to find about \$70,000 to pay for one year of treatment. To me, this is absurd. Not only do I have to deal with the trauma of having been diagnosed with breast cancer, but I need to find that sort of money for what is believed to be — for me — an essential treatment.

So on top of the normal demands my 10-month-old places on me, the emotional ups and downs of this experience and the nausea, tiredness and hair loss caused by chemotherapy, I have to worry

about finding about \$2000 every three weeks to pay for my Herceptin treatment.

Life as I imagined it would be is almost non-existent.

Walks in the park with my daughter are too hard most days — essential daily activities feel enough of a struggle. Catching up with friends can occur only if no one is unwell because of my increased risk of catching illnesses owing to my lower immunity.

The stares I get when I go out with a scarf on my bald head are embarrassing. The doctors' appointments, blood and other medical tests and chemotherapy days feel as if they rule my life.



Going through this is extremely tough and I am so grateful to our families and close friends for their love and support, and their attitude of, "It does not matter how much it costs, we will find the money". I know this is their way of trying to ease my worrying.

I am usually very independent and strong-willed, so it feels uncomfortable to need to rely on so many people for such simple things as housework and meals.

Our parents have to babysit Grace — and look after me, too. My mum does the housework and cooks for our family when I am not feeling well. The burden on them worries me, because this is a time of their life they should be enjoying.

I understand a petition of many hundred signatures has been sent to the Federal Government expressing the need for Herceptin to be made available under the PBS for all breast cancer sufferers.

I feel saddened that people need to go to these lengths to make the Government aware of the community's strong feelings.

I plead with the Government to make this drug available under the PBS so no more breast cancer sufferers carry the financial burden my family and I face.

Hopefully I will get through this and we will still be a family, despite the fact that the cost of Herceptin may place us in financial hardship for many years to come.

If you want to help Elizabeth Crosby, you can donate to the Libby Breast Cancer Foundation at any Bendigo Bank or contact John Crosby on 9855 8705.



## 'It's now become personal'

LABOR HAS A NEW TARGET IN THE WHEAT SCANDAL, SAYS GLENN MILNE

**W**ITH Parliament resuming tomorrow, Labor has a new target in its sights over the AWB scandal; former deputy prime minister, John Anderson.

With the battle over the "wheat for weapons" inquiry becoming one of the most intense and sustained in recent political history, Labor's intention to go after Anderson signals a new phase in the contest. It's now become personal.

Anderson was not a minister at the time and had no responsibility

for the AWB. He had quit as deputy prime minister and was sitting on the backbench. But Labor is interested not in his ministerial dealings but his business affairs.

The opportunity for Labor's attack on Anderson came through revelations last week that Foreign Minister Alexander Downer met the head of the United Nations inquiry into the "oil for food" program, Paul Volcker, in New York in September. At that meeting, he was told about serious allegations concerning AWB's illicit activities in Iraq.

A month later Downer met AWB executives and told them the report was bad for the company and they needed to meet Volcker as soon as possible.

So what has all this got to do with Anderson? Well, six days later the former Deputy PM sold a parcel of AWB shares. But he did not alert the Clerk of the Parliament, who oversaw the members' pecuniary interest register, until February 16 this year. One day later he sold a second parcel of AWB shares. He also overlooked declaring those.

This much was public. But now, with the revelation about Downer meeting Volcker, Labor is demanding to know if the Foreign Minister, or anyone else in the Government, tipped Anderson off.

Anderson, known as a straight shooter, said: "It's complete rubbish. Alexander Downer didn't talk to me and neither did anyone else."

And a spokesman for Downer described the allegations as nonsense and muckraking. He said: "If they have any evidence, take it to the Cole Commission."

## Time to end this unholy madness

The Muslim reaction to the Danish cartoons of the Prophet is a wasted opportunity, says Yemeni journalist **Mohammed Al-Asadi**, who is himself in jail facing execution over the controversy

**W**E agree that the controversy over the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed highlights the need for further dialogue on the twin issues of the principle of the freedom and responsibility of the press.

*The Yemen Observer* has called on Muslims to accept apologies offered over published caricatures of our Holy Prophet and to act with "calm and dignity".

This responsible attitude was called for also by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission and other peace lovers worldwide in a move to mobilise dialogue between cultures.

Nobody would deny that the publication of the cartoons has caused great offence to Muslims across the globe. One has to ask what is behind this controversial publication of the caricatures.

While the controversy has been brewing over the Danish newspaper, publications in France, Germany, Australia, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Switzerland have decided to publish all or part of the collection of cartoons.

Those newspapers have done so,

**"A new opportunity is lost, like many others before. Muslims know how to lose opportunities better than how use them."**

according to them, to support the freedom of expression and the right to blaspheme.

That was not a wise decision, neither was it a show of solidarity with freedom of expression.

With great respect, we read the (British) *Guardian's* editorial which says: "The *Guardian* believes uncompromisingly in freedom of expression, but not in any duty to gratuitously offend. It would be senselessly provocative to reproduce a set of images, of no intrinsic value, which pander to the worst prejudices about Muslims. To directly associate the founder of one of the world's three great monotheistic religions with terrorist violence — the unmistakable meaning of the most explicit of these cartoons — is wrong, even if the intention was satirical rather than blasphemous. Their most likely effect will be to encourage Islamist extremism, already finding fertile ground in Iraq."

This attitude should be hailed. The whole world was shocked by the Muslims' firm stand against the offensive drawings of their prophet. This should have brought about positive results, not bloodshed and destruction such as that in Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Muslims have an opportunity to educate the world about the merits of the prophet Mohammed and the peacefulness of the religion he had come with.

A new opportunity is lost, like many others before. Muslims know how to lose opportunities better than how use them.

Bryan Patterson, Page 80