

MEDIA RELEASE

5 August, 2015

Family tragedy inspires conversations about organ donation

The Myatt family of Toowoomba talked about everything.

Husband and wife, Paul and Shelley, were open in their opinions and discussions about not only the ins-and-outs of family life with their four teenage children, but also bigger issues like organ and tissue donation.

It was these important discussions, Shelley and her children had ringing in their ears when they faced one of the toughest experiences of their life.

In January, 2012, the Myatt family's life was upended when the car Paul and three of his children were travelling in, crashed just outside of Toogoolawah, in the Brisbane Valley.

Tragically, 18-year-old Imogen passed away at the scene, and Paul was airlifted to the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital with severe brain injuries.

Despite every effort made by the doctors, Paul was pronounced brain dead the following day.

"I had to tell my children that not only had they lost their sister but Paul was gone too," Shelley said. "It was hardest thing I've had to do in my life."

It was at that stage that Shelley and her family were approached about donating Paul's organs and tissues.

"Paul was a donor and it was something he talked about a number of times during our marriage and in front our children," Shelley said.

"It was something that he was proud of. He was a good man and I think it was very much in his character to do something like donating his organs.

"We all knew it was what he wanted. It was nice to be able to respect his wishes."

Five people benefited from Paul's donation. Sadly, one organ recipient passed away three days after receiving Paul's liver.

"We received letters from all the recipients and we were grateful to get that feedback," Shelley said.

"Unfortunately, the little boy who received Paul's liver did not make it. His mum wrote to me and explained how grateful she was to have those three extra days with her son.

"Out of all the letters we received, that one was the most special for me.

“I was grateful that she got that extra time.”

Toowoomba Hospital’s clinical nurse consultant for organ and tissue donation, Liz Hill, said unfortunately not all families openly discuss organ donation.

“It’s not something that every family sits around and discusses at the dinner table,” Liz said.

“But I know when it is openly discussed, it can result in wonderful outcomes for people who are on the organ donation waiting list.”

While all Australian residents over the age of 18 can register to become organ and tissue donors online, when the time comes, the final consent must be given by the patient’s next of kin.

Organ donation can only occur in just one percent of deaths. To be eligible, the donor must be pronounced brain dead, be located in an intensive care ward and be on a ventilator.

“Organ donation always comes about through a tragic, sudden situation and it nearly always involves a head injury,” Liz said.

“If families know their loved ones wishes around organ donation, then a small amount of uncertainty and stress can be alleviated.”

Shelley is well-known in the community for her role as the manager of the USQ Works Health and Recreation Centre.

However this is the first time she has publicly spoken about her husband’s final act of generosity.

She hopes it will inspire others to follow his example.

“Knowing that Paul helped those people has given us something positive to focus on,” Shelley said.

“We don’t have any regrets and that’s why, knowing the benefit of organ donation, we try and encourage others to make the same decision.

“It means everything to us that Paul was able to make a difference.”

Ends

MEDIA: Contact Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service Media Team 4699 8547, 0438 702 328 or DDHHS_media@health.qld.gov.au