



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

Matter of Public Importance

21 June 2017

BOWEL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (18:24): I congratulate Temporary Speaker Aplin on his new role. Bowel cancer is a deadly and insidious disease—the kind of disease that sneaks up on people without them knowing about it. It is also a disease that, if caught early, can be treated and cured. That brings me to the important matter of public importance tonight. It is Bowel Cancer Awareness Month—a time to raise awareness of every step that individual Australians can take to deal with cancer. We can undergo screening for and treatment of this cancer. Bowel cancer is also known as colorectal cancer—cancer of the colon and rectum. It is Australia's second biggest killer—a disease that claims the lives of 80 Australians every week, which worries me. Australia has one of the highest rates of bowel cancer in the world which can be attributed to a number of things including poor diet, lack of exercise, smoking and drinking.

Coming from a family of seven, all of whom smoked from time to time, I know that smoking is not good. It is interesting to compare the behaviours that can be attributed to bowel cancer with the behaviours that lead to heart disease or stroke. There is a similarity, but by changing little things we can change our predisposition to bowel cancer—for example, having high-fibre diets, doing more exercise and, if possible, giving up smoking. Across the Hunter the incidence of bowel cancer is 15 per cent higher than the State average, and mortality rates are 29 per cent higher when compared with the State average. I do not know why that is; it is something on which we should ponder and for which we should find answers. I will talk later about some studies that have been going on. Based on current Australian trends, one in 12 people will develop bowel cancer before the age of 85. Bowel cancer does not affect men or women exclusively—it affects all of us.

Earlier I announced that this month is Bowel Cancer Awareness Month. Today is Red Apple Day, which aims to increase the awareness of bowel cancer and to reduce any embarrassment associated with the disease. Bowel Cancer Australia's apple logo is symbolic of the charity's bowel cancer message: bowel cancer is preventable, treatable and beatable if detected early. A University of New England and Hunter New England Health study of the Hunter community showed that 20 per cent of adults with bowel cancer symptoms, such as bleeding, have not consulted their doctor about their symptoms—a staggering percentage. Screening involves taking a specimen and sending it away for

testing. By doing this one may help to minimise one's chances of developing bowel cancer. I say to people, "If you are having problems with bleeding, please contact your doctor. Do not be frightened. I am sure that doctors deal with such things every day." The thing to be frightened of is not taking any action at all.

I encourage all members in this place to get behind Red Apple Day and to be supportive of the campaign to raise awareness of bowel cancer in our community. As members of Parliament we need to get out into our communities and get the message out to people to change their behaviour. I ask people to change their eating patterns, to include more fibre in their diets, to exercise more and to undergo regular screening tests. This will minimise their chances of developing serious bowel cancer. Catch it early by acting now. I commend the member for Wollondilly for bringing this important matter to the attention of this House.