

The real business killer

The high incidence of prostate cancer among over-50 men makes the disease very much a concern for the business community. By Ted Whitten Jnr.

Untimely death is not something any of us dwell on. We put our heads in the sand and hope it won't happen to us or anyone close to us.

But it does happen, as I found as the son of incomparable 321-game Bulldog veteran Ted Whitten. Ted, an icon of Melbourne, was robust, fit and full of life, but his passing was quick, tragic and devastating.

Who can forget that lap of honour before the 1995 Victoria/South Australia State of Origin match, when Ted used his last remaining strength to salute the

crowd? He was weak, he was nearly blind, yet he wrenched at the hearts of the thousands in the stands and the countless more who watched on television.

Ted's passing highlighted the insidious nature of prostate cancer more savagely than any advertising campaign. All of Melbourne felt they knew Ted senior and felt his loss personally.

But what if someone in your organization who is as important to your success as Ted was to sport should suddenly be imperiled? What would the effect be if your "Ted Whitten" was no longer there. What would it cost you?

You wouldn't dream of going without risk insurance. You can't operate a business without Work Cover insurance, and yet for the lack of a policy which requires all male employees in the at-risk age group to have a regular health check, your business could suffer irreparable harm.

Prostate cancer kills about 2700 Australian men annually and occurs mainly in the over-50 age group. This is the same age bracket likely to contain the senior executives of the business.

So it makes even more sense to implement a serious program to detect, at

the earliest point any health problems. Prostate cancer can take up to four years before death occurs, and kills only after the disease has spread to the bones.

What would be the effect of an early death of any of your key staff in your business? Apart from the devastating loss of a colleague and friend, the grief, the gap in the organization, what would be the cost to the business?

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer found in Australian men, with about 12,000 new cases diagnosed each year. Many do not develop into terminal cases of cancer but sadly early curable prostate cancer is without symptoms. As Western life expectancy grows ever higher, the incidence of life-threatening illness associated with ageing also grows.

Manly silence has historically prevented men at risk from obtaining an early diagnosis of prostate cancer, the only event that has a chance of remitting the disease. Men are reluctant to discuss or even think about their medical welfare, sometimes with tragic consequences. The fact of the matter is that the diagnosis is quick and easy. It takes just a simple blood test to detect the possible presence of the disease, and from that point on treatment will commence.

Let's not beat about the bush. The subsequent Digital Rectal Examination (DRE) is not the most pleasant medical procedure you'll ever have, but it only takes a moment or two. It may well save your life, and the experience is likely to

be far worse for your GP than for you.

The initial blood test is covered by Medibank and only requires a doctor's appointment. This can be arranged as a company initiative whereby the blood tests are conducted for all the male employees in the vulnerable age group.



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There are many programs which have been very effective in the early detection of medical problems. Screening for breast cancer has been a highly successful initiative.

The E J Whitten Foundation is the

leading advocate for prostate cancer awareness for men's health. Formed in 1995 to honour Ted, its objective is to raise awareness and money for research into the disease. So far, the Foundation has raised over \$1 million, with the main fundraiser being the E J Whitten Legends game, played annually by retired AFL stars with guest appearances by celebrities – including some who can even play.

The Federal Government has shown its support by granting the Foundation \$100,000. A new national initiative involving the Australian Hotels Association to raise awareness commences in early 2007 using the medium of 8500 hotels to promote the message. Fosters recently raised \$140,000 at an Ashes series function. 1300Aust has been very active in donating, and the RSL recently joined with the Foundation to promote awareness through their clubs around Victoria.

There can be no denial now that the disease is being taken very seriously. The fact that big and small business is so involved in donations and support to raise awareness of prostate cancer demonstrates that they understand the devastating effects of doing nothing.

Your business cannot afford to do nothing.

E J Whitten Jnr is chairman of the E J Whitten Foundation. For more information www.ejwhittenfoundation.com.au

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