



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

ADJOURNMENT

Rowe, Mr Louis

SPEECH

Thursday, 3 November 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Irons, Steve, MP

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Mr IRONS (Swan) (10:55): Today I rise to talk about Louis Rowe, a young Australian who I met recently. I feel his story must be told. I will continue to update parliament on his story while I am still in this place. The information I am giving you has come from Louis's website and from my discussions with him. Louis began primary school at St Joseph's in Warnambool in Australia in 1990. After year 6 he graduated to Emmanuel College in 1997. After two years at Emmanuel, Louis attended St Patrick's College as a boarder. Sadly, boarding was phased out there so Louis entered Xavier College at Kew in Victoria in 2000, where he completed years 10, 11 and 12. Footy was the sport that Louis loved and played during the winter. The boarders had quite a strong team in the school league. Louis was accepted to the Australian Catholic University.

On 26 January 2007 Louis and three of his best mates from school days embarked on a well-planned trip to Thailand. The boys had purchased the appropriate travel insurance. The day they arrived in Phuket they found some accommodation, where they spent three days. Then they got on a ferry to the island of Ko Samui. The next day they decided they would hire some scooters to check out the whole island and rented them through the hotel. They offered their Australian drivers licences but were just asked to sign a waiver and hand over their passports. There were no questions asked. They were away.

Louis was cut off by a car that lost control and he fell off his scooter. At the Ko Samui Hospital they found his injuries included a damaged spinal cord. The message from Louis on this is do not hire a motor vehicle of any sort unless you have the appropriate licence and check your insurance contracts.

Louis lost the use of his lower body and was told by a Victorian hospital that there was nothing that could be done for him. On 11 March 2008 Louis went to India to try some stem cell treatment with Dr Shroff, who featured in a *60 Minutes* program with Sonya Smith from Brisbane. Louis was away for nine weeks. Sonya is a young mother of two and had the same complete cut spinal injury as Louis. She is now standing with the aid of callipers and slowly walking with aids. She is improving daily.

Louis has returned to India a few times and he has steadily improved. The treatment he has been having is human embryonic stem cell, HESC, therapy, which is changing the face of modern medicine as we know it. Dr Geeta Shroff has developed the technology to isolate human embryonic stem cells, culture them, prepare them for clinical application and store them in a ready to use form with a shelf life of six months.

Further, this technology is being used clinically to treat patients suffering from various conditions all presently characterised as incurable—spinal cord injury, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, cardiac conditions and many more. In more than five years of clinical applications in over 500 patients the results are nothing short of astounding. Patients paralysed from the neck downwards have resumed function of their arms and are taking steps and diabetics on high doses of insulin are now leading lives insulin free.

Dr Geeta Shroff has developed the only purely human embryonic stem cell lines that do not show any immune reaction in the body. Embryonic stem cells do not have any antigenic proteins on their surface and thus do not require immunosuppressant drugs. Dr Shroff's technology involved the use of just one embryo. During her laboratory research she only used surplus embryos from an IVF donor who underwent a barrage of tests, including a complex medical history and genetic history.

In conclusion, Louis left the Talbot Rehabilitation Centre in Melbourne unable to stand and feel anything below his waist. They trained him to manage life in a wheelchair and offered no other hope. Today Louis Rowe can walk slowly but surely. He can stand for at least two hours at a time. When he stands he can feel the pressure on the soles of his feet. Louis can swim the length of a pool. He can lie on his side and lift his leg from the hip and move it back and forward from the knee down. He is able to slightly wriggle the toes of his left foot. Every day he regains more feeling in his feet and his legs. One of the most successful results is that Louis can now use his bladder. He has that control.

Louis, God bless you. I know you are listening. I wish you all the best in the future with the treatment. It is unfortunate that young Australians such as Louis have to leave our shores and travel to countries overseas to get treatment that should be available in Australia. As the Australian community look at the number of people who do travel overseas to get that type of medical treatment, it is something we should put on the agenda and start talking about again. I wish Louis all the best. Another constituent of mine, Allison Somers of Lynwood, is going through the same problems in getting the correct cancer treatment in Australia due to the delay by TGA—another issue that has been raised.