

Thanks, Peter.

This might seem like an odd tack to take but I wanted to...start – and I promise THIS won't take long - I wanted to START by telling you what 2017's Brain Injury Awareness Week ISN'T.

Some of you might share my view that our defence force veterans often seem like soft targets for worthy causes and promotions. Australians have a soft...spot for uniforms. (You might remember Woolworths – “the FRESH FOOD people” - their, what, ill-fated, and abandoned, “FRESH IN OUR MEMORIES” advertising campaign around 2015’s ANZAC Day, for example.)

The theme [POINT] for this year's Brain Injury Awareness Week didn't come out of the blue and wasn't landed ON veterans. It's part of a larger piece of Brain Injury Australia's awareness-raising work - that started with sports concussion and has now extended into women, family violence and traumatic brain injury (Brain Injury Australia recently led a successful consortium bid - comprising Monash University, Domestic Violence Victoria, the men's behaviour change service No To Violence and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare – for \$300,000 in funding to conduct Australia's first prevalence study of brain injury among BOTH victims and perpetrators of family violence, to be completed by the end of 2017 – one of the 227 recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.)

And – in spite of appearances [POINT] - this year's Week ISN'T devoted to SEVERE but to MILD/ MILD-ER traumatic brain injury. (For the more, what, technical of you in the audience; two of the injury thresholds are loss of consciousness lasting LESS THAN 30 minutes, post-traumatic amnesia of LESS THAN 4 hours.) MILD traumatic brain injury has been

referred to as the “signature injury” of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some 360,000 United States Armed Forces veterans have sustained a brain injury – sometimes the result of improvised explosive devices – since 2000. 4 in every 5 of those brain injuries were designated “mild”. One in every ten AUSTRALIAN Defence Force personnel who have served in the Middle East “reported the criteria for a new/ post-deployment MILD traumatic brain injury”.

(Maths was never my strong suit but arithmetic RULES here.) The last time NATIONAL data was collected – in 2004-2005 - 23,000 people were ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL with a traumatic brain injury. The rough rule of thumb is, indeed, around 80 per cent of those TBIs would have been designated “mild”. And all but, say, 10 to 20 per cent of the **18,000** of those people with “mild” TBIs could have expected to have made a full recovery within 3 to 6 months. But that still leaves 3,000 or so people who...didn't – what the literature refers to, disparagingly, as - the QUOTE “miserable minority” - those with persistent ongoing symptoms such as headaches, dizziness and vision disturbance, and problems with everything from short-term memory through to balance to behaviour change.

And that's...just HOSPITALISATIONS. Every year in Australia around 3,000 people are hospitalised after being concussed, just from playing sport. But triple that number won't seek medical attention. And as many as ten times that number won't even report their concussion to teammates, coaches or family because they may fear being removed from play. Or they don't even know they're concussed. Nine out of ten people HOSPITALISED with concussion don't even recognise the injury. And then you've got to remember that, when our public hospitals are under such cost pressures, most people who present at casualty with 'mild' injuries won't be admitted. Though the 'tip of the iceberg' analogy is over-

played, the true numbers of people long-suffering “MILD” injury is anyone’s guess.

Awareness-raising is a...business. It’s a business because it’s competitive. EVERY week is an awareness week for some worthy cause, every DAY is an awareness day for some obscure disease, some unsung affliction. And these days and weeks are like ocean waves that rise, break, wash over the public only to re-form.

EVERY year.

So, the last thing that Brain Injury Australia wants to do is to set OFF a competition for awareness BETWEEN BRAIN INJURIES of DIFFERING SEVERITIES, especially when the background level of community understanding of brain injury OVERALL – regardless of external cause – is so low, relative to other disability types.

Neither does Brain Injury Australia want to set UP an artificial, and unproductive, rivalry with combat-related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (“PTSD”) – where many of the symptoms and signs of PTSD overlap with TBI, and even though rates of PTSD are roughly comparable with “mild” TBI. A 2010 Australian Defence Force Mental Health Prevalence and Wellbeing Study estimated that 8 per cent of personnel will have experienced PTSD in the preceding 12 months. AND even though, in terms of both a service response and a research effort into evidence-based interventions, TBI has tended to be PTSD’s...poor cousin.

To turn away from the unmet needs of people living with “mild” TBI – and post-concussion syndrome – would NOT, at least, do justice to the

disparateness and diversity of the over 700,000 Australians living with an acquired brain injury, with daily “activity limitations” and “participation restrictions”.

And surely, one, THE ULTIMATE aim, of any awareness-raising effort is to make the world beyond that person with a brain injury’s bedroom, outside their front door as understanding, as compassionate, as... welcoming, as possible. INSTEAD, people living with the debilitating consequences of one, or more – the CUMULATIVE effects of multiple - “mild” injuries face a perfect storm that combines; often THEIR lack of acceptance of, even positive resistance to, a label of disability; low levels of community recognition of a disability that can’t be...seen; their ineligibility for expensive, RATIONED specialist brain injury rehabilitation; compensation and insurance scheme distrust of an INDIRECT relationship between standard measures of INJURY SEVERITY and resulting DISABILITY; and the dearth of evidence-based interventions. Often, all they ARE TOLD, all they can DO is to wait for a...silver lining.

This “miserable minority” includes the chronically concussed sportsperson, (what used to be called) the “battered woman”, and soldiers like Major Andy Cullen, who sustained multiple “mild” TBIs from multiple blasts carrying out Explosive Ordnance Disposal in Afghanistan. He will speak to at the Week’s opening that I will be hosting next Monday in Brisbane, the Week to be officially launched by the Surgeon General of the Australia Defence force, Air Vice-Marshal Tracy Smart.

And I thought I’d also seize this opportunity to REMIND some of you about, INTRODUCE others of you to, Brain Injury Australia’s annual fundraiser, Sidetember [SLIDE] Since 2012, Sidetember has raised

\$120,000 for people living with a brain injury. Last year, 5,000 people nationwide registered for Sidetember, organising their own fundraising events or signing up for “SideChallenges” – that allow them trade places, in imagination, with people living with brain injury, to give them an insight into what the disability might be like for those who live with it, permanently.

And this year, 85 per cent of the proceeds from Sidetember will go to support Return2Sport - an adaptive sport, recreation and leisure service based right here at Royal Rehab.

Can I urge each of you to visit www.sidetember.com and urge your family and friends to do likewise and register for 2017’s Sidetember. Thank you.