

LAWYER'S BID TO AID ALFRED BIOBANK

PROMOTING RESEARCH ON BRAIN TUMORS IS A PERSONAL MISSION FOR LAWYER NADINE UDOROVIC. **BY KARIN DERKLEY**

Nicholes Family Lawyers partner Nadine Udorovic always wanted to be a lawyer like her father, family law barrister John Udorovic QC. In early 2005 she was excited to pose for her admission with her dad outside the Supreme Court. At the time he seemed completely fit and healthy, she says.

But just one month later, as he was being briefed in his chambers, Mr Udorovic suddenly collapsed at his desk with a catastrophic seizure. "My managing partner Sally Nicholes happened to be briefing him at the time," Ms Udorovic says. "She had to resuscitate him and he was rushed to the hospital where he was put into an induced coma for four days. If she hadn't been there, he would have died there and then."

After days of tests and brain scans, the family received the devastating diagnosis. Mr Udorovic had a rare and aggressive type of brain cancer called CNS lymphoma. "Life suddenly went from being normal, to never being the same again," Ms Udorovic says.

Admitted to the Alfred Hospital and cared for by a childhood friend senior neurosurgeon Jeffrey Rosenfeld, Mr Udorovic had extensive rounds of chemotherapy, radiotherapy and stem cell therapy. He went into remission twice, but unfortunately he died in April 2008, almost three years after he was diagnosed.

Brain cancer is one of the more deadly forms of cancer, killing more people under 40 than any other cancer. Frustratingly, the outlook for patients with brain cancer has not improved in more than a decade.

"Unlike other cancers where some people can live for up to 20 years, there's often

not a long time that patients with brain cancer will live once they get diagnosed," Ms Udorovic says.

"My dad had the best of the best doctors all around Australia throwing everything they could at it, but I remember when they said we've done everything we can and there's nothing more we can do."

What was also shocking was the scarcity of effective treatments for the disease. "Dad had a number of procedures, which were all pretty invasive, because of where the cancer was located," Ms Udorovic says. These included a cranial drain which required drilling three holes into his head to drain the fluid to try and reduce the swelling.

Mr Udorovic also endured weeks of radiotherapy treatment which by necessity targets the brain. "And that really affects people's cognitive skills," she says. "As soon as my dad went into remission, he told his clerk he wanted to take on some work. But he ultimately had to stop working because of the effects of the radiotherapy."

The poor prognosis and limited treatment options for brain cancer patients is something Ms Udorovic is trying to help turn around by promoting research being carried out by the Alfred Hospital Foundation in conjunction with Monash University.

The Alfred Brain Tumour Bio-databank (ABTB) is collecting biological samples and data from patients who have been diagnosed with a brain tumour in a bid to understand more about the molecular and genetic features underlying brain tumour development and how better to treat it.



Nadine Udorovic with her father John Udorovic QC at her admission

"What they're hoping is to conduct further research using those samples to look at developing other techniques for treating brain cancer and potentially being able to prolong people's lives after diagnosis," Ms Udorovic says.

It's the kind of research project that Ms Udorovic is confident her dad would have been delighted to participate in. "I'm sure he would have said take whatever you need and use it towards research."

To raise much-needed funds for this research, Ms Udorovic is working with the ABTB team to organise a fundraising charity ball to be held on 2 October (depending on COVID-19 restrictions). Along with medical researchers involved in the biobank, she will be speaking at the ball from her perspective as a family member and what it is like to go through a brain cancer battle with a loved one.

"I've always wanted to do something in this area since my dad passed away 13 years ago but I've never had the right opportunity. It feels good to be doing something and working with the people who helped my dad."

The legal community can be involved by buying one of the limited tickets to the ball or by donating to the Alfred Foundation which has set up a special platform to fund the research. There is also an open auction that people can bid on from outside even if they do not attend the ball (donate.alfredfoundation.org.au). ■