

NEWS

## Kicking up a fight for life

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Andrea Davy | 21st NOV 2015 7:45 AM



Amanda Grobbelaar.

Tony Martin

AMANDA Grobbelaar says she is "kicking up the fight of her life".

The Mackay mum, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2011, is planning on travelling overseas to receive vital treatment.

The medical procedure is called hematologic stem cell treatment, but Amanda just describes it as "risky, yet so worthwhile".

She is now on a global waiting list for treatment which could happen in Russia, Germany, Israel or South Africa.

The love from her family, which includes husband Charl, daughter Annerie, son Ewan and daughter in-law Yvette, has carried her through her battle.

Journalist Andrea Davy sat down with Amanda to talk about the treatment and her latest fundraising efforts.

*The last time I spoke with you, you were getting ready for the Mackay Marina run... are you still running?*

Yes, I am going to run the half marathon again, just to prove last year's wasn't beginners' luck.

*Why is running so important to you?*

Well, instead of letting the fear of ending up in a wheelchair paralyse me, I joined a running club.

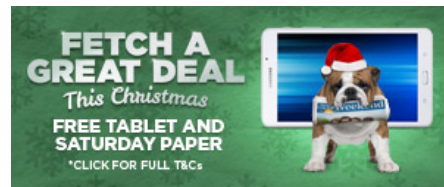
*Your friends have helped you fundraise for your treatment, how did that come about?*

The hardest thing about this journey is not just accepting help, but it's me learning how to ask for help.

My (friends) saw I wasn't going to start anything because the prospect of me having to ask for help was just weighing too heavily on my shoulders.

Two of them, they had a quick meeting and decided to donate a week-long holiday at Shearwater Resort.

We wanted there to be a good chance for people to win so we only released 200 tickets.



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We sold them at \$25 a ticket, our hope was to raise \$5000 and we raised \$5100. So it was a beautiful and amazing effort.

*How will the overseas treatment work?*

The treatment starts with a round of chemo to stimulate the stem cells in your bone marrow, and when you have grown enough of your stem cells they will harvest them and freeze it somewhere else to keep it safe.

And then, after that they start doses of chemo, which can stretch between four to six days.

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And then they will re-introduce your stem cells back into you.

It is a risky treatment.

*Why can't you get the treatment in Australia?*

It has been in trial stages in Australia for MS. But the trial stage (in Australia) will last for another 10 years. And for too many people, sadly, they do not have 10 years to wait.

*How has MS changed your life?*

The best way I can describe what's happening to me is that MS is trying to put my brain in a wheelchair.

I was a financial adviser for 16 years. I was used to implementing complex strategies for my clients.

To be a financial adviser, mathematics and the economy, it was my passion. I used to feel so alive when I did it.

But at some point last year I had to make the very hard decision to close the financial services door.

*When do you think you will get the treatment?*

I am on a waiting list in Russia. But only until 2017. There are so many people around the world who go for this treatment; the results have been extremely promising. In many cases it has stopped the MS in its tracks.

So, it really sounds like the miracle I have been praying for.

*How does it work? Are you on a global waiting list for this treatment?*

I am on a waiting list for Russia; I have a case number in Germany. And I have an interview in Israel.

I am actually hoping for South Africa, because I have family there and I can speak the language. It's a very strict process.

You are hand-picked for the treatment and they put you through all the tests imaginable. They even looked at everything dental.

Because, after they have wiped out your immune system you are susceptible for infection, that's actually the greatest risk.

*Wiping your immune system clear, to me, sounds terrifying.*

Yes, it is. It is risky. But living with MS... I am more terrified of that. I have a husband, who I adore. We will be married for 24 years in February. He is still the love of my life.

The thing with MS is that it doesn't just happen to the person it happens to the whole family.

My daughter, she was 14 when I got my diagnosis.

She put her hand on my back and said, "Mum you know I am not ready to go on without you".

That's why I am kicking up the fight of my life.

My family is worth it.

My son is now 21.

He and his wife Yvette visited me on the weekend and I asked him how he felt about the treatment.

He said: "Mum, I think you are very brave for considering this. If I was in your position I would do the same thing. Obviously we don't want to lose you. But we support you all the way."

The great thing with my family is that we all believe in miracles.

We all believe that I shall receive a miracle.

*Have you always been this positive?*

On top of the MS I also have a brain tumour. But I can sit here and say to you that I am blessed.

And I really feel as though I am blessed.

It's not just a facade... that's what I feel in my heart.



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  - Jobs
  - Motoring
  - Real Estate
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