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NEWS

Battle for

Community pledge to go it alone

Bronwyn Cummings

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CANCER has taken Liz Plummer's hair and her eyelashes but it will never take her passion to fight until Far Northern cancer sufferers get the help they deserve.

Mrs Plummer is not only battling aggressive breast cancer but also the Government's refusal to provide vital oncology facilities in Cairns.

She is leaving dozens of Far Northerners who leave their families for weeks at a time and travel to Townsville and Brisbane for radiation treatment, at huge financial and emotional cost.

The 56-year-old has a simple message for Premier Peter Beattie.

"I pray to the Lord to help me get better, to help me be a better mother, a better person and to be around to give that boy from Atherton Peter Beattie a bloody good kick in the arse because he needs to be responsible," Mrs Plummer said.

"But with or without him, we are going to do this - we are going to win."

The fight for better cancer services is being led by the newly-formed Committee for Oncology Unit for Cairns Hospital - or COUCH - which has vowed to unite the community and fundraise for better oncology services.

COUCH's campaign comes as investigations by *The Cairns Post* reveal:

- The State Government has splurged more than \$2 million on art in Queensland Health facilities in the past two years.

- The Government is spending up to \$730,000 a week on advertising.

- Oncology services in Cairns are almost "non-existent" when compared with other regional cities of a similar size, including Townsville.

COUCH last week launched a project to raise \$850,000 for a chemotherapy hood to mix cancer drugs in Cairns.

The Government has given a commitment to match the money raised by the community, but critics say it should be funding the lot.

Campaign supporter Dr Ken Chapman said there was no question the Far North had missed out on hospital facilities.

"We have been really left behind but



Fighter: Liz Plummer during one of her treatment sessions and (inset) at the COUCH meeting last week.

this is not new because it seems we are just too far from Brisbane or Canberra for them to remember us," Dr Chapman said.

"We are overdue for these facilities. Nevermind this waiting five or 10 years - we need them now."

Queensland Health has told COUCH Cairns will have to wait up to 15 years before it has enough public patients to run its own fully-operational and viable oncology unit.

Cairns Base Hospital already services a regional population of more than 250,000, while tourism and other industries attract an estimated 35,000 to the area each night.

Business asked to help

THE challenge has been set for Cairns businesses to dig deep to help ease the suffering of Far Northern cancer patients.

COUCH chairman Charlie Woodward said about \$60,000 had already been raised toward the committee's first project - the \$850,000 cancer-drug mixing machine to stop about \$40,000 of wastage a month when products arrive from Brisbane late or in an unusable condition.

"We've already had a great response but we need more and I urge all businesses in Cairns to donate similar, more or less," he said.

Apex Cairns has already given more than \$11,000, while ABCON Construction, BigCat Cruises and The CaPTA Group have all chipped in \$10,000 each.

More than 10 other businesses and organisations and the community have opened their wallets and cheque books.



COUCH Cairns and The Far North Queensland Hospital Foundation is urging people to mark September 30 on their calendars to take part in the Cairns Cancer Crusade Charity Walk. ► For inquiries about the walk telephone Sandy at Brothers Leagues Club on 4053 1053.