




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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ADJOURNMENT

Condamine Electorate, Champix

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (6.48 pm): Two suicides potentially associated with the stop-smoking medication Champix have personally impacted my office in the past 12 months: one, a young man of 38 with a wife and three young children suddenly took his life just a week before Christmas in 2016 and the other, a well-known local man who had a wife, four grown-up children and a younger child, inexplicably took his own life earlier this year. These two deaths sent shockwaves throughout the community and impacted so many lives. Both men were taking the stop-smoking drug Champix. Prior to their deaths, these two men had no previous history of mental illness or suicidal tendencies.

Research shows that, between 2008 and 2014, there were 58 known suicide cases in Australia that are potentially associated with Champix. That number could now be much higher. The 2013 death of 22-year-old Timothy John, a young Brisbane boy, was recently the focus of an inquiry into the stop-smoking drug and suicide. He had been taking the medication for just eight days. Timothy's mother, Phoebe Morwood-Oldham, has been fighting to have the labelling on the drug carry a warning against the possible side effects of Champix. Queensland coroner John Hutton has expressed alarm that there was no warning on the box of the possible side effects of this drug. Mr Hutton has suggested that all suicide deaths in Queensland should be forensically screened for the drug to find out the extent of the potential problem.

Pfizer, the drug company that distributes Champix, has failed to adequately warn Australians of the risks of taking this anti-smoking drug. In America, where the drug is marketed as Chantix, the pill packs are marked with highly visible warnings and contain a leaflet listing potential adverse side effects, while in Australia the packaging is bare and patients have to ask pharmacists for the leaflet. A representative of Pfizer told the Queensland coroner that warnings and information regarding the side effects of the drug could be found online. I do not know of anyone who would request the information leaflets or go online. Most people would depend on visual warnings on labels, or the prescribing doctor's knowledge and care to recommend a safe and effective drug.

We all know the health risks of smoking: lung disease, stroke, heart disease. The two men whom I have mentioned were trying their best to quit for themselves and their families. Unfortunately, they did not know the risks of taking Champix. The least that should happen is that this drug carries a warning. The best that should happen is that this drug is removed from the market so that no more lives are lost or families left grieving.