

Nth Beaches

Widow Caroline Kelly devotes life to Avner Pancreatic Cancer Foundation after losing husband to disease

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Caroline Kelly's life changed after her husband was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. They set up a charity to raise funds for the disease and now it is her full time job. It has raised \$6.3m, she is promoting a walk in Manly. Picture: Braden Fastier

When Avner Nahmani first felt stomach pains it was on the day he moved into his dream home in Avalon with his new wife.

Just over a year later he died from pancreatic cancer. He was lucky to live 13 months.

Symptoms are so vague that most people who are diagnosed with the disease live just three to six months, with some only surviving a few weeks.



Caroline Kelly, who runs Avner Pancreatic Cancer Foundation, pictured with her husband Avner Nahmani.

Widow Caroline Kelly, 43, from Manly, said they had little knowledge of pancreatic cancer before her husband's diagnosis, but soon came to the conclusion it was the "underdog" of cancers in the cancer world.

"Life expectancy for those with this type of cancer is so poor people don't live long enough to support a charity," she said.

With no organisation dedicated to the disease, the couple decided to set up a fund to raise \$1m, with the money to be spent on pancreatic cancer research.

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With Mr Avner's employer Woolworths on-board, the money poured in.

But it was too late to help Mr Nahmani who died aged 56, just three years after the couple's wedding.

After her husband's death Ms Kelly decided to continue what the couple had started because she felt that families affected by the disease "really deserved their own charity".





Avner Nahmani with new wife Caroline Kelly on their wedding day in 2005.

The research fund has now evolved into the Avner Pancreatic Cancer Foundation and it is the only charitable organisation dedicated to pancreatic cancer in Australia.

As well as offering support and information for patients and their families, it is also raises funds for research with the aim of improving survival rates.

It's now a fulltime job for Ms Kelly, 43, who gave up her job as a business analyst to run it, despite no previous experience in charity work.

Under her leadership it has raised \$6.3m.

“It has changed my life,” said Ms Kelly, who attends all seven charity walks held across the country.

While her life has taken a very unexpected turn she said she feels she has to keep pushing on for the families of those with “this terrible disease”.



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The Sydney charity walk has always been at Palm Beach, a place where Ms Kelly and her husband used to escape to during difficult moments.

However, this year the 5km route will be from Shelly Beach to Queenscliff and back starting at 10am on Sunday, August 16. It is hoped the new route will attract more walkers.

Go to putyourfootdownsydney2015.gofundraise.com.au for more details. You can also register on the day from 9am.

Breakout box:

More than 2,800 Australians are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer every year

Only 6% of pancreatic cancer patients survive more than five years

Median survival rate is between three and six months

It has the worst survival rate of all cancers

Hollywood actor Patrick Swayze and Australian journalist Peter Harvey died of pancreatic cancer

avnersfoundation.org.au

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