

Goldberg's friends for life

NAOMI LEVIN

DR Ronnie Goldberg, the man who put organ donation on the national agenda, is doing it all over again, this time with a large grassroots campaign to raise funds for leukaemia research.

Dr Goldberg – whose work featured in *The AJN* in May – has been prompted into action again after seeing a friend battling leukaemia. With assistance from his Rotary Club, Dr Goldberg established “Friends are For”, a fundraising initiative that hopes to raise \$180,000 for leukaemia research. The Australian Rotary Health Research Fund jumped on board, agreeing to match him dollar for dollar if Friends are For raised \$90,000.

Friends are For began in a small way and has expanded and captured people's imagination, much to the shock of Dr Goldberg, but perhaps not the people who know him.

Inspired by his efforts, Dr Goldberg – a dentist with an infectious, larger-than-life character – was approached by other people, who had been touched by leukaemia. They had all watched family members, or friends, battle the disease and in less than six months, 14 grassroots Friends are For groups were established and about \$80,000 had been raised.

“We all feel so helpless; we see our

friends or family suffering and going through chemo, but we can't do anything,” Dr Goldberg said. “Friends are For is a bit like a cancer because it just keeps spreading!”

One group was formed around a fellow dentist during his battle with leukaemia. Following a bone marrow transplant, the dentist went into remission and he, himself, has now taken on the task of raising money for Friends are For.

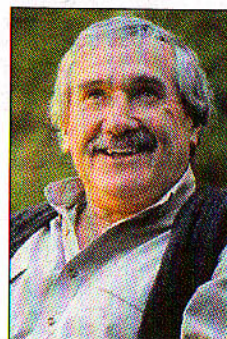
“‘Friends are For’ is a bit like a cancer because it just keeps spreading!”

DR RONNIE GOLDBERG
Founder, Friends are For

Another Jewish friend was diagnosed with myeloma, a cancer of the blood marrow, after her sternum suddenly cracked. She has now become instrumental in funding research at the Royal Children's Hospital.

Initially, Friends are For sponsored leukaemia research at Melbourne's Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. Now, as well as Peter Mac and a new project at the Royal Children's Hospital, it is also donating money to research at the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

“All the hospitals are attacking cancer from different angles,” Dr Goldberg explained. “I like to say that



Dr Ronnie Goldberg is leading a grassroots campaign to raise funds for leukaemia research.

Rotary is fighting a war on cancer and each of these hospitals is taking the battle on a different front.”

In fact, the concept has grown so big that the leadership from Leukaemia Australia and Cancer Australia visited Dr Goldberg to discuss his initiative.

“The head of Cancer Australia, Professor David Currow, was just off his tree [with the idea]; he said it is wonderful and asked if he could join forces with me,” he said, adding that Cancer Australia plans to donate 25 cents for every dollar raised by Friends are For.

Dr Goldberg is not sure what the future holds for Friends are For, but if the first few months are a true bellwether, then the concept is here to stay.

To donate to Dr Goldberg's Friends are For campaign, send a cheque to FR4 c/o Rotary Club of Williamstown, PO Box 111, Williamstown 3016.

All donations are tax deductible.