

The brighter side of brain surgery

By LIAM PARSONS

"IF YOU are going to have a brain tumour, mine is the one to have."

So says Laurie Barram, a Brisbane blogger who has taken the phrase "look on the bright side" to the ultimate extreme.

Mr Barram runs two online blogs detailing his ongoing medical battles, including live posts from the hospital where he underwent brain surgery.

He started his first blog, Oligo-Lucky (<http://oligo-lucky.blogspot.com>) a play on words of his oligodendroglioma brain tumour, in 2006 when scans revealed a brain tumour had returned 12 years after he underwent surgery in the early 1990s.

"I went looking on the web for stories of people with brain tumours and pretty quickly found lots of depressing stuff about people with only three or four months to live - really sad stuff," Mr Barram said.

"So I thought I had a bit of a good story to tell - to put something positive out there is what I was thinking - so I did a blog called Oligo-Lucky because my brain tumour has been benign so I've had a good life while I've had it.

"I thought there's a story that people should be able to find.

"People who have been diagnosed with brain tumours might not be so depressed if they could find something positive, so that's what started me off."



A cut above... a post-operation image of blogger Laurie Barram who chronicled his brain surgery online.

While that blog features photos of Mr Barram kayaking, mountain climbing and trekking with partner Cheryl, his second one started in May this year details his preparations for brain surgery.

Titled "It's Brain Surgery, Not Rocket Science", (<http://brain-surgerynotrocketscience.blogspot.com>) the blog has provided family and friends with regular updates from inside the hospital ward at St Andrew's Hospital.

Even Mr Barram's neurosurgeon, David Walker, has found the website useful.

"I was really fascinated to have a look at it," Dr Walker said.

"I'd never heard of that, it was like a real time publication of what was happening to him.

"It gave me a different perspective as well.

"It was a much more patient-oriented thing and he was sharing it with his friends and family who weren't there.

"I thought it was really good and I'm glad it helped him."

It's Brain Surgery, Not Rocket Science features regular updates, ranging from a video ahead of surgery of Mr Barram wearing lifesaver locators - used to locate the tumour during the operation - to photos of him with his scars after the operation.

The sad reality of brain tumours was again brought home this month by the death of Professor Chris O'Brien, a cancer specialist who was an inspiration to Mr Barram.

Dr Walker said that, while brain cancer was not as frequent as breast, prostate or lung cancer, its impact was equally devastating.

"Because they affect relatively young people and they affect the person's ability to work and they're so deadly, they have a much greater impact on society than their frequency would suggest," Dr Walker said.

It takes a lot more than a brain tumour to slow Mr Barram down.

He plans to keep the blog active during his coming six-week stint of radiation therapy and during a planned trip to New Zealand.

"Cheryl and I want to get back to New Zealand to do some more trekking over there. That's the plan for the second half of the year," he said.

"If anything, [having a tumour] has accelerated me because, having this thing in my head, you realise your time is limited so you better get out there and do things while you still can."