



# Dye left Aussies crippled **Firm refuses to help**

**Sue Dunlevy**

SIXTY-thousand Australians crippled by a risky medical practice have been refused help by the world's third-largest drug company.

GlaxoSmithKline marketed an X-ray dye that was used for more than 40 years and has been linked to arachnoiditis, a painful condition that fuses the spinal nerves together.

A parliamentary committee last month demanded the pharmaceutical giant set up a charitable foundation to help patients left crippled and incontinent by the condition.

But the company has rejected the recommendation, claiming: "GSK considers it has acted responsibly at all

times in regard to the supply of Myodil.

"We believe that it would not be appropriate for GSK to be responsible for establishing a charitable foundation as recommended by the committee."

Between 1945 and 1987, tens of thousands of Australians had the dye injected into their backs before a spinal X-ray.

The dye was linked to arachnoiditis as early as 1951 and, by 1971, GSK included a warning about the risk on its prescribing information sheet for doctors.

Medical experts who gave evidence to a parliamentary inquiry have compared the case with the harm caused by

tobacco giants and asbestos company James Hardie.

While the drug company said it had "the utmost empathy" for people afflicted by arachnoiditis, it wouldn't help them.

Liberal MP Steve Irons, who helped set up the inquiry, said he was "not surprised" at the drug company's response.

"I am, however, surprised at the speed of their response. It seems they had made their mind up and have not given it a lot of thought," Mr Irons said.

"The frustrations and damage the sufferers have been having for decades will continue. There seems to be no hope for them."

GlaxoSmithKline, which sponsored charities all over the world, should have "stepped up as a corporate citizen" and set a charity up to help arachnoiditis victims, Mr Irons said.

Max Scott, who relies on a wheelchair to get around after being injected with a similar X-ray dye to Myodil, said he was "disgusted" by GSK's response.

"I feel absolutely and completely deserted," Mr Scott said.

"I'm sitting here in this wheelchair wearing a nappy because I've got no control over my bowels and bladder," he said. "It's not fun."