I lost my leg to bone cancer in 1987 and had my first temporary fitting at St George Hospital in Kogarah. My fist leg was a plaster of paris (so they called it – being a large clump of plaster). I remember having a very experienced physiotherapist and all her training was leading me to understand how to use a 1970's designed safety knee joint. Being only 15 years of age at the time and prior to having my leg amputated above the knee I was a very sporting person. I look back now to see the huge efforts made from the physiotherapist and the time and energy that I contributed were essentially a total waste of time.

The reasons being;
1: I was trained on how to walk on a 1970's designed knee joint which was not suitable for my needs. (Sadly this knee still exists and is still being supplied to new amputees in Australia, 24 years after my experience).
2: The many sessions with the physiotherapist were designed to use only 'this particular' knee joint. Therefore any other knee joint that I would be fitted with in the future would require additional therapy because the style of walking would be so different.
3: Because the technology of the knee joint it did not restore any faith in my ability to be able to use a prosthesis at all. And the thought of not being able to use a suitable prosthesis lead to and caused significant depression.
4: The physio taught me to walk only one particular kind of knee, so I would not fall from the 1970's technology – the unit had severe restrictions and as a result I could not participate in any activities other than very short walks; particularly difficult for a fifteen year old.
5: The training that I was given on how to walk on this knee is embedded in my mind so I will not fall on my prosthesis – unfortunately this is not a practical way for me to walk today but I still sometime display these bad walking habits which were taught to me in the early days. It is not good for my physical well being or my gait pattern.

Learning to walk again with a prosthesis is a huge task and a very daunting experience – even after 1 to 2 years of trial and error with different sockets. So after much perseverance I choose to live my life on Canadian crutches. I did this because the technology supplied to me did not allow me to live anything near to a normal live. I made a choice for the better to live my life on crutches because our government failed to provide patient care for disabled people. Still today (24 years after my amputation) there is very little change; unless you have money or have insurance due to limb loss following an accident. But even then you spend several or many years trying to claim this insurance and suffer ill mental health in the meantime.

I spent most of my time on crutches from approx 1989/90 until 2002 when socket technology improved and Silicone liners were adopted which provided much needed comfort and promote healthy skin care. Still today we cannot get funding for silicone liners which are such a small price to pay for a disabled persons comfort. Luckily I had a sponsor to provide these liners for me. In 2003 I was also sponsored a C-leg which positively changed my life dramatically. It would be described best as; I can now live a normal life.

I use my prosthetic leg from morning until night, 7 days a week without the use of crutches (maybe only in the case for use of the shower). I now have my hands free from crutches I can carry things and provide a more supportive role as a parent and am able to provide confidence to my prospective employers.

My mental state had improved dramatically since receiving a comfortable liner and a more suitable knee joint. There is no comparison when you include your well being or mental health. A failure of not being able to feel or walk in comfort amongst the community, friends or family causes dramatic effects and can lead to depression. The first thing an amputee wants after a loss of limb is to feel normal, and or part of the community again. I see a lot of amputees who currently receive funding via the public system who cannot work or achieve normal house duties because of the poor prosthesis provided to them by the Government systems. It would make so much sense to provide more than adequate componentry to amputees so they can return to work and get out of their depression. I believe most amputees would prefer to earn their own income rather than to sit at home collecting a lousy welfare cheque. They would be more of a proud of personal achievements and have the ability to regain their life, their independence and to be back in the workforce; if provided with suitable prosthetic componentry to allow them to do so.

I would not be able to use a prosthetic leg without the use of a silicone or comfort liner. This is a must have for every amputee!

Believe me no employer wanted to hire a person on crutches or a person in a wheelchair. Being able to 'walk' into an interview made me more employable and impressive to the employer.

Today I use technology which was designed about 10-15 years ago and the component has been used in the Australian market for approx 10 years. There is no doubt the technology has proven itself time and time again and yet, only a small or limited number of amputees have access to the benefit of such technology. I am fortunate to have it and to live a normal life, but I struggle understand why most amputees are still living life the hard way. Facing the diversities of being an amputee is hard enough but to be subject to 3rd world technology from our government is very disheartening. I don't know if the Government has any sympathy or feels any shame for putting disabled Australian's through such difficult times.