

PM grants teen's Dying Wish

EIGHTEEN-year-old Gary Buchanan yesterday got his dying wish — to meet with Prime Minister Bruce Golding -- a meeting that ended with a pledge that might give the brave teen a little more time.

Buchanan, now a patient at the National Chest Hospital in St Andrew, was diagnosed with cancer last year after several tests revealed that a lump which had appeared on his right hand in February of that year was more than just a harmless swelling. Though his arm was amputated in a bid to save him, Buchanan's cancer has spread throughout his body, affecting his very ability to breathe.

Faced with the stark reality, he expressed one wish -- To see the prime minister. Unable to write because of the loss of his arm, Buchanan's doctor Jephthah Ford left the message for Golding who last week returned to the island after an official visit to China.

"This young man is 18 years old, he has cancer, he is dying. I found a message on my desk when I got back last week. He said he knew that he was dying but he would love to meet me before he died. That's why I came," Golding said after leaving Buchanan's bedside.

"There are one or two things that have been identified that can be done to try and provide him with some comfort, which includes some material that they don't have available here. The minister (Health Minister Rudyard Spencer) is going to try and arrange to get that," he said.

"I just felt I had a duty to try and cheer him up and his mother and his grandmother. He is the eldest of seven, he was a student at the HEART Trust/NTA. He was studying welding but he became ill and he had to stop and it's so hard, you know, for an 18-year-old at a time when you are looking forward to a life and to be told you're not likely to be around much longer; That's sad, really sad. Whatever we can do for him, we're going to do," the prime minister pledged.

Buchanan's mother, Racquel, said that the teen's life has been a series of hospital visits since the initial diagnosis. She said the family was now waiting with bated breath to see his chances at life improved.

"The treatment is not available here but Mr Golding sent for it," the 35-year-old mother said.

Speaking briefly, his voice muffled by the oxygen mask which has become a necessity for him, Buchanan said he had wanted to meet Golding because he believed the prime minister would help him. He admitted to "feeling better since the prime minister came".

Senior medical officer at the hospital, Dr Terry Baker, said that Buchanan was in need of a stent -- a tiny tube -- which is not available in the island and will have to be sourced and bought overseas.

She was, however, unable to say what was the cost of the stent.

"His case is quite complicated. He has had spread of his cancer so he will need other medical assistance. It is urgent, so we are going to endeavour to source it from overseas," she said.

"Because of the spread of the cancer he has difficulty breathing," added Dr Baker. "And because of that he cannot lie flat, and what would assist him is a stent which would help to open his airways, but it is a particular type which is not available here now. He will require other kinds of assistance." Jamaica Observer