



# Drugs stole my life



Effects: Pat Galea became addicted to gambling. Picture: TONY GOUGH

A SUBURBAN grandmother claims a prescription drug used for restless leg syndrome turned her into a thief, conwoman, and then jailbird.

Pat Galea alleges the drug made her an addicted gambler who lost about \$400,000 over eight years, cost her her marriage and shamed her previously spotless reputation.

The Rosebud grandmother of two turned to shoplifting and dishonesty offences to feed her compulsive behaviour.

She was jailed for a month after breaching several community-

SUE HEWITT

based orders, and was placed on suicide watch.

"In the end I wasn't only gambling with money, I was gambling with my life," Mrs Galea, 61, said.

Mrs Galea is one of 100 people who are taking legal action against two drug giants, claiming to have become addicted to gambling or sex after taking drugs known as "dopamine agonists" to treat Parkinson's disease, restless leg syndrome and other conditions.

The drug firms Pfizer and Aspen

Pharmacare Australia were served Federal Court writs this week alleging they breached a duty of care to customers.

Mrs Galea said: "I used to be the one who controlled the (family) finances; and suddenly I was out of control. It was scary, I was a different person, I'd never gambled beforehand and suddenly I was waiting for my pay to lodge and it would be gone the next day. Common sense told me... it had to be the medication."

Mrs Galea stopped taking the medication in 2008 and said she

had not gambled since. The Australian class action is being run by Anne Shortall of Arnold Thomas & Becker, who said the effects of the compulsive behaviour caused by the medications had been disastrous. "It has caused financial losses, family breakdowns and criminal charges for some clients," she said.

"Companies that have profited from the sale of the drugs should have warned of the side-effects and should be held accountable."

Aspen Pharmacare refused to comment. Pfizer did not return calls.

## Leave cuts for Reserves

DEFENCE force reservists who have fought in Afghanistan and East Timor have been told they will have their leave entitlements slashed — by the Department of Defence.

As public servants brace themselves for a "horror" May Budget and job cuts, angry reservists have discovered they may have to use holidays to volunteer.

Annual service commitments vary for reservists, but active service roles often require a greater commitment than the 20-day minimum service period that establishes a reservist's eligibility for long-service awards, the Health Support Allowance and subsidies under the Defence Home Ownership Assistance Scheme.

The Defence Department outlined its bargaining position during negotiations with unions in Sydney last week, including plans to introduce a standard public service entitlement to four weeks'

SAMANTHA MAIDEN  
National politics editor

leave for reservists. Reservists working for the Defence Department are currently offered up to five weeks' leave.

"We think this is a silly decision that will undermine government policy to boost the Reserves' capacity," Public Service Union national secretary Nadine Flood said. "Cutting Reserves leave for 1400 staff in Defence makes little sense and has deeply angered many staff."

Across the public service, a standard leave entitlement of four weeks will actually improve the lot of some reservists to volunteer for Defence training, but the majority of the reservists are in the Defence Department, where it will be cut.

The national president of the Defence Reserves, Major-General Jim Barry (retired), said he was very disappointed at the Defence Department's bargaining position.

## Shark widow's pain

THE widow of shark attack victim Nick Edwards has told of the pain of losing her husband, revealing she did not get the chance to see him on the day he died.

Mr Edwards, 31, a keen surfer, was fatally mauled by a shark on August 17 at South Point, a surfing break north of Margaret River in Western Australia.

Speaking in the week her husband would have celebrated his 32nd birthday, Melissa Edwards said she was starting to overcome the tragedy as she focused on raising their children, Nathan, 11, and Lucy, 3.

But Mrs Edwards,

TREVOR PADDENBURG

speaking publicly for the first time, said she was still struggling to cope with the fact she didn't get to see him before he was taken.

"Nick always got up early to go surfing so he was gone by the time I woke up," she said.

Mrs Edwards, 33, said the children were generally coping well.

"Lucy is a lot better now. She's stopped talking about Daddy every day. She understands Daddy's died and she understands when we're at the cemetery, that's where Dad is. Nathan is pretty strong too," she said.

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