

I got rid of my skin cancer – without any surgery



Misha Lynn, 41, was about to have surgery to remove a skin cancer on her nose, when in the waiting room she read an article on a new non-invasive therapy that changed everything...

'I first noticed a red mark on the end of my nose last summer. After a couple of months, it still hadn't gone, so my GP referred me to a dermatologist and I was diagnosed as having a basal cell carcinoma (BCC).

I saw a plastic surgeon and he recommended that I have Mohs micrographic surgery (stripping the skin

slice by slice), and then a skin graft taken from behind my ear. He wasn't forthcoming with details, and couldn't say how significant the scarring would be. Although I was told there wasn't a non-surgical alternative, I didn't feel happy at the thought of my face being disfigured.

I went to see a private plastic surgeon for a second

opinion. He was able to explain things better and said the scarring was likely to be the size of a five pence piece. I decided to have the surgery and last March I sat nervously in the waiting room. I picked up a magazine and by chance saw a story about a woman who had a BCC on her nose and had it treated with photodynamic therapy (PDT). I couldn't go ahead with the surgery after that.

The article referred to a charity called KILLING Cancer, who work with PDT specialists. They put me in touch with Mr Collin Hopper, who has been treating people using PDT for 16 years. He couldn't guarantee the extent of the scarring, but given PDT's success rate, that it's available on the NHS and is approved by the Government drugs' watchdog NICE, I made my decision. I had the initial Foscan drug injection, then returned for the 200 seconds of light exposure to activate the drug to kill the BCC.

The procedure was painless. The only aspect that has been challenging is the light sensitivity. At home, I spent the first week inside, often with the curtains

closed. The area on my nose had turned black and was oozing with liquid from a blister-like wound. Then it started to scab; by week three, I was back at work.

At the moment, everyone is staring at my nose, but once the scab has fallen off I should have new skin. I don't know what the extent of the damage will be, but I'm hopeful – and relieved I was able to avoid surgery.'

◆ **Skin cancer is primarily caused by sun damage – UVA and UVB – in our early years. We're all at risk, but children and those with fair skin and red hair are at higher risk. Damage is more likely to occur at the start of the year when the skin is least prepared for the sun, and there's little melanin near the surface of the skin.**

TREATMENT

Skin cancers are usually removed by surgery. If this isn't suitable, then radiotherapy or chemotherapy may be used. Radiotherapy can also be given after surgery to stop the cancer returning.

PDT uses a chemical that makes the skin cells sensitive to light. When the area to be treated is exposed to laser light, the cells then die off. Visit killingcancer.co.uk.

DOC'S VIEW

Dr Ann Robinson says:

'Photodynamic therapy is a wonderful addition to the range of treatments available for a basal cell carcinoma. It can cause some scarring, though, and it isn't suitable for all skin types. It's also not effective in all cases.'

