

Doctors told Beverley Moy that the only effective treatment for the skin cancer on her face would leave her disfigured for life. Two years later, she tells MADELEINE BAILEY, how a little-known therapy has left her skin healthy and cancer-free

**T**WO YEARS ago, when Beverley Moy was diagnosed with skin cancer, doctors insisted that her only option was to remove part of her nose and cheek, leaving her with a permanently weeping tear duct and the trauma of follow-up plastic surgery.

"It all came about so suddenly" says Beverley, a 70-year-old retired singer, dancer and hairstylist.

"Originally, I'd gone to my GP about another problem and mentioned that I'd like the sore red spot on the side of my nose treated.

"My GP took a look and said it was probably a rodent ulcer, another term for a basal cell carcinoma – a type of skin cancer that's rarely fatal but needs to be treated to stop it spreading."

While Beverley, from Blackpool, waited for an appointment with a dermatologist, she came across the website of a charity called Killing Cancer.

"It explained about photodynamic therapy (PDT), which uses light therapy to cut off the blood supply to the cancerous area, killing cancer cells. It doesn't involve surgery or radiotherapy, so has minimal side effects and scarring."

The dermatologist didn't share her enthusiasm. He believed that the area was too big to be treated with PDT and referred her to a surgeon. Beverley was told that it would take 12 months to recover and there was a chance of recurrence.

"I was horrified," she says.

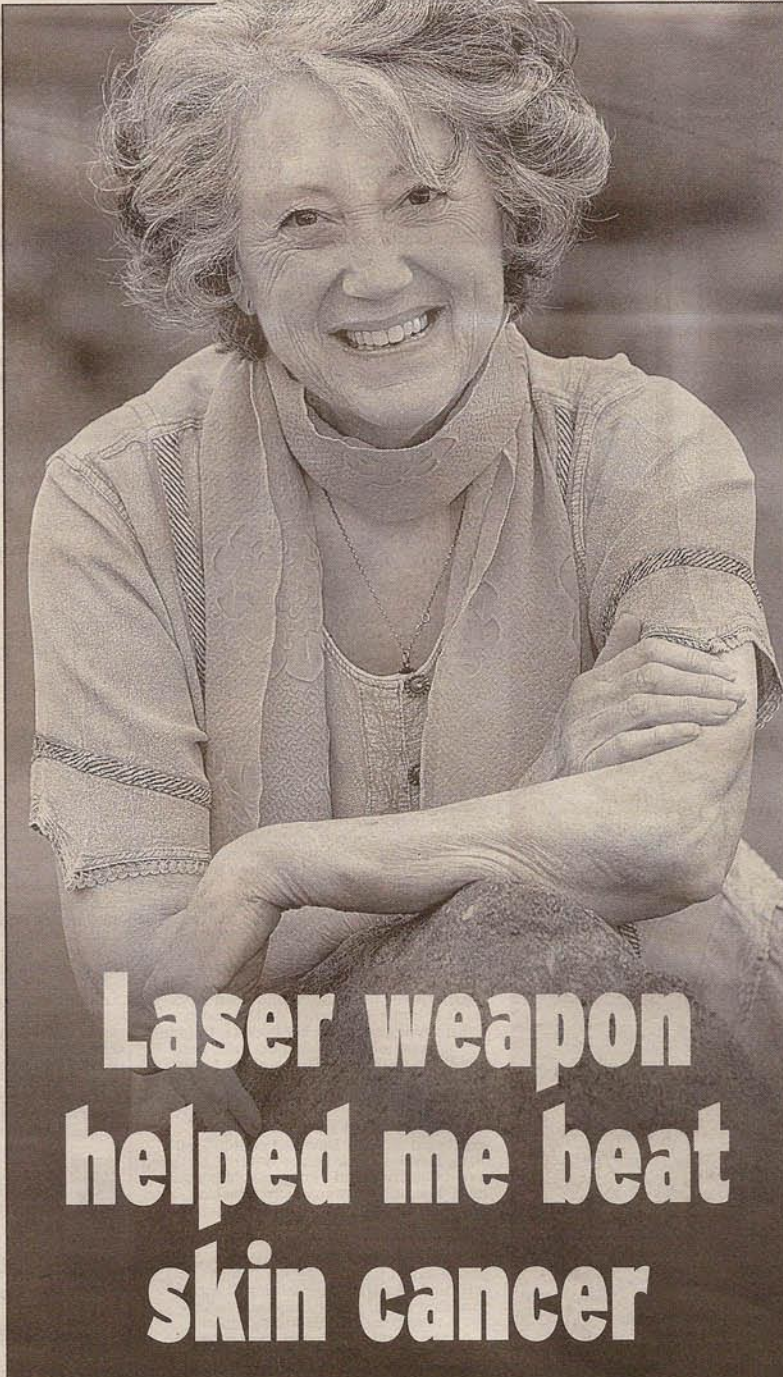
"I explained that I wasn't going to have my face cut open and I wanted PDT instead. I was referred for a second opinion but that was also fruitless.

"So I e-mailed Killing Cancer, who said that it would be possible for me to be treated on the NHS at University College London Hospital NHS Trust. I was over the moon."

Finally, in January this year, after several more setbacks, Beverley got the treatment. "I was injected with a drug that made me light-sensitive, so I had to stay away from bright light," she says.

"After a local anaesthetic my eyes were covered with a rubber mask, leaving a hole for the area to be treated. I could hardly feel the laser and the whole thing took just a few minutes.

"Afterwards, the area went black but there was no pain, which apparently is unusual," she says. Within a month only a little mark remained. "I'm delighted," says Beverley. "I suffered no pain and my skin is now near-perfect. Even my GP is impressed. But it took



## Laser weapon helped me beat skin cancer

two years to get there.

"Altogether, seven doctors told me it wouldn't work. It's frightening to think that if I'd accepted their views I would have ended up with months of pain, permanent scarring and a weeping eye," she says.

"You can't expect doctors to know all the latest treatments so you have to do your own research. But if you are told no, the only way to be sure that something really isn't possible is to go straight to the people who carry out the procedure."

Since then, NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) – which assesses the cost-effectiveness of treatment for the NHS – has issued guidance for the use of PDT laser treatment for non-melanoma skin cancers. And, while this may increase the chances of

the treatment being offered, doctors need to be made more aware of it.

Colin Hopper, consultant maxillo-facial surgeon at University College London Hospital NHS Trust, who has treated 600 patients with PDT, explains: "More medical reports and publications are needed to make doctors aware that it's an effective treatment."

**A**CCORDING to Hopper, the advantages of PDT include speed, healing and no side effects apart from pain. "The drug is retained at a higher level by tumour tissue than by healthy tissue, so normal skin cells are less likely

to be affected," he says. "And because there's no heat involved, the treatment is gentle and healing is quick."

In some cases, it is also cheaper than surgery. "PDT can be carried out on an outpatient basis and may cost as little as £1,000," says Hopper.

Unfortunately, it isn't suitable for cancers that have spread. It works only for pre-cancer and early (non-melanoma) skin cancer, as well as some other forms.

Trials are ongoing into its use for those of the prostate and bile duct. And research is being carried out into its effectiveness for a range of conditions including MRSA and age-related blindness.

● For more information, log on to [www.killingcancer.co.uk](http://www.killingcancer.co.uk)