

Second chance at life for mum after cancer

By Barry Nelson

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A MOTHER-OF-FOUR who was told she would die unless she had major surgery is enjoying life after revolutionary therapy destroyed her cancer.

Jean Pringle, 64, from Bishop Auckland, was told she would probably have to lose her tongue and voicebox when an aggressive cancer came back after radiotherapy.

Mrs Pringle, who has four grown children and two grandchildren, was warned that she would probably die within months if she did not have surgery.

Because she wanted to be able to talk to guests at her son Sean's wedding in August, she turned the surgery down.

Now, following treatment that destroyed the cancers in her tongue and neck and which allowed her to attend her son's wedding, she is delighted she refused to go under the knife.

Only weeks after she read about a little-known way of killing cancer called Photodynamic Therapy (PDT), she was being treated by the country's leading exponent of the

Jean spared from surgery by therapy

therapy. She said: "I contacted the charity Killing Cancer which promotes PDT, and within ten minutes, Colin Hooper, a surgeon who does PDT in London, rang me to say he was fairly certain he could help me."

Within a few weeks of the call, Mrs Pringle was referred by her GP to the University College Hospital, in London, where she was treated with cancer-killing drugs triggered by the pinpoint beams of a laser.

PDT has been used for a number of years and is gradually becoming more widely accepted.

It is used to treat pre-cancer and early cancer of the mouth, oesophagus and skin, but not for malignant melanomas.

For external cancers, the drug is rubbed onto the skin and activated by exposure to bright light.

For internal cancers, the patient is injected with the drug



HAPPY OCCASION:

Jean Pringle at the wedding of her son, Sean, to Rachel Jarvis, in Kent

and kept in a dimly lit environment.

Five days later, hollow needles are inserted into the cancers so light can be directed precisely onto the site by lasers.

Mrs Pringle said: "I came into the University College Hospital on a Thursday and had the injections, and then on the following Tuesday, they put eight hollow needles into my neck and tongue."

It is too soon to tell if Mrs Pringle is completely cured, but she now feels "fairly fit and well" and is enjoying life again.

She said: "What I do not understand is why isn't this available everywhere? Why don't the surgeons offer this as an alternative to radiotherapy and chemotherapy?"

PDT is only available at a handful of centres, including hospitals in London, Wakefield and Birmingham.

The NHS has yet to introduce the therapy on a large scale because it is relatively new. The Killing Cancer charity said it would like up to 25 PDT centres to be opened around the UK.

For information about PDT, go to killingcancer.co.uk