

Health S.O.S.

True health drama

'Pond muck saved my arm'

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As the hospital doors swished shut behind me, I accidentally knocked my left arm on the glass.

'Ow!' I cried. *That hurt.* My arm throbbled. It felt as if a heavyweight boxer had thrown a punch at it.

'Are you OK?' asked my dad, David Longman, 51, as he saw me wince with pain.

'Fine,' I lied. 'We're going to get this sorted, love,' he promised.

Well, we'd better, because I was losing hope fast.

When I was 6 my arm had started swelling up and become really painful. Eventually, I'd been diagnosed as having a vascular tumour growing between my elbow and wrist, in the middle of two bones running through my arm, the radius and the ulna.

Apparently a vascular tumour's a bit like a strawberry birthmark,

but it grows beneath the skin, rather than on the surface.

The tumour was non-cancerous, but it was growing, so I had surgery to remove it.

For the next 10 years it seemed fine. Then five years ago, when I was 16, the swelling and pain started to get steadily worse.

It turned out that what I'd thought was just scar tissue was actually the tumour coming back.

Over the years, the pain had gradually become unbearable. The tumour was pressing right on my bone.

To get rid of it, a surgeon would have to scrape away loads of bone, leaving it so thin that it would break all the time. The only option was to live in agony or have my arm amputated.

What a choice. But Dad refused to give up. He'd done loads of research on the internet and found out about something called photodynamic therapy.

That involved doctors injecting green fluid from pond algae into the bloodstream, then using a laser to activate chemicals in the fluid to kill the tumour.

The chemicals in the fluid make the cells very sensitive, so when hit with a strong light they're killed.

It had sounded pretty strange to me, but I'd been desperate.

I'd first tried it two years earlier, in Russia, but it had failed. Still, Dad was convinced it would work and



TODAY

Now I can get on with the rest of my life free from pain

he'd managed to find someone in the UK who did the treatment.

If it didn't work this time, I'd definitely have to have my arm amputated from the elbow down.

So, here we were at the National Medical Laser Centre at University College Hospital, London.

Please let it work... 'Hi Louise,' grinned the specialist as we walked into his office. 'I'm going to be

handling your treatment.'

'Hi,' I smiled.

'I understand you had a failed

treatment in Moscow, but what we do here is slightly different. We use a more modern version of the drug.'

Remembering the agony I'd felt as the fluid was injected into me last time, I nodded. Hopefully it wouldn't be so painful this time.

But it was. The tumour had affected the blood vessels in my left arm so badly that the drug needed to be injected into my right arm to circulate through my blood and get to the tumour.

As the liquid was injected into me, it burned horribly. The stinging, hot sensation gradually moved round my whole body, lasting for three days.

On the third day, I finally had the light therapy. Under general anaesthetic, the light was administered through a thin tube inserted into my arm next to the tumour. The whole thing only took about 45 minutes.

The next day I felt my arm — and my jaw dropped.

The tumour had gone. The treatment had worked!

All those years of agony had been finished with in one day.

But any trace of the tumour that was left could regrow, so two months later I had an MRI scan to be sure.

I almost cried when I got the results. The tumour was gone.

It's been eight months since I had the treatment and it hasn't come back. I can't believe green muck saved my arm!

'Gradually, the pain became unbearable'



BEFORE

I tried to put on a brave face in hospital, but I was in agony

FACT FILE

- **VASCULAR TUMOURS** are a type of raised strawberry birthmark. Normally they're on the surface of the skin, but in rare cases they can grow deeper or underneath the skin.
- Doctors aren't sure what causes them. Some disappear on their own, but others need to be removed surgically and often a tumour can grow back.
- Photodynamic therapy has been used to successfully treat vascular tumours. For more information, visit www.killingcancer.co.uk.