

Chronicle Insight: Charity aiming to help

make 'secret' treatment a reality for majority of NHS patients

For £50m we can kill cancer



lily.cancer@northantsnews.co.uk

AFTER discovering a unique treatment which cured his daughter's cancer and then facing the realisation that it could have saved his late father's life, Northamptonshire resident David Longman vowed to prevent the tragedy from happening to anyone else.

He set up the charity Killing Cancer from his home in Woodford to campaign for the widespread use of Photodynamic Therapy (PDT).

Now two years later he has the support of broadcaster Sir David Frost, presenter Chris Tarrant and pin up Linda Lusardi and is trying to raise £50million to develop the cancer treatment.

The process works with the use of a laser, or other light sources, combined with a light-sensitive drug to destroy cancer cells.

Mr Longman, a former advertising and PR employee, explained why he has devoted his life to this little-known treatment.

"I was sitting at my dad's hospital bedside as the life ebbed out of him. I had all the questions that everyone else has about why, what, how.

"A couple of months later, I was sitting in the National Medical Laser Centre at London's University College Hospital. I was searching for a treatment for my eldest daughter, Louise, who has a vascular tumour in her left arm.

"She had tried everything else that the NHS appeared to have to offer, other than radiotherapy that would have melted the nerves, muscles and tendons in her arm. As Louise said, if she lost them, she might as well have an artificial arm.

"Their recommendation in London for Louise was Photodynamic Therapy. It wouldn't involve heat, and nor would it be a cocktail of drugs like chemo that would wreck her white blood cells and have her hair fall out.

"PDT was, they told me, something of a secret, but they were prepared to try it on her.

"I also told the medics the story of my dad. I asked them if PDT could help helped him. There was a silence in the room as both men looked at each other and then at me. "What are you trying to tell me?" I asked as the silence seemed to last forever."

Using his father's inheritance Mr Longman set about launching a charity to raise funds to develop the treatment.

He has met many obstacles along the way due to some doctors doubting the benefits of the treatment.

Information by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), an independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on health treatments, states that it is up to local health authorities to decide whether the benefits of the treatment are cost-effective.

NICE guidance notes on using PDT to treat oesophageal cancer say there are still uncertainties over how well the procedure works in reducing the size of tumours.

It continues: "If a doctor wants to use PDT



David Longman, the founder and director of Killing Cancer Charity. David promotes the

development of photodynamic therapy (PDT) at the National Medical Laser Centre at University College Hospital in London

CE picture LOUISE O'CALLAGHAN 070619LOC12

for early stage oesophageal cancer, he or she should make sure that extra steps are taken to explain the uncertainty and the likely benefits and potential risks of the procedure.

"A common problem after PDT is that the skin becomes sensitive to sunlight. This happened in up to 13 per cent of patients.

"Another problem is that the oesophagus may get narrower after PDT. This happened to between seven per cent and 35 per cent of patients.

"The expert advisers stated that, as well as the risks described above, PDT might cause nerve damage, chest pain, fever, nausea, damage to the oesophagus or lungs, effects on the heart, low blood pressure, bleeding, progression or recurrence of the cancer, and death."

But Mr Longman still believes that it is

financial backing which is preventing many health trusts from using the treatment.

He added: "PDT isn't a miracle cure, but it does have a role to play in the treatment of many people and many cancers and other conditions."

"Skin and mouth cancer are two of the big areas where the treatment is a standard procedure, while it is starting to have some amazing successes with lung cancer, as well as prostate and oesophageal cancers.

"At the National Medical Laser Centre there are just two full-time staff, with others dedicating their spare time and personal funds to develop the science.

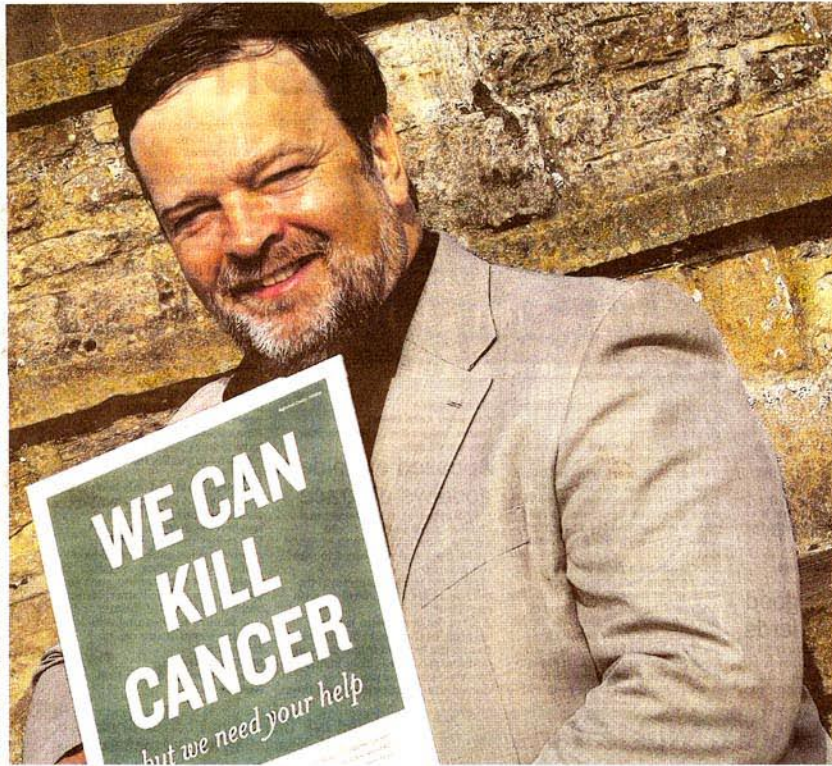
"The many smaller drug companies backing PDT don't have the budgets to push things forward. One of the challenges is to get one of the major drug companies to take an interest."



Chris Tarrant



Linda Lusardi



David Longman, the founder and director of Killing Cancer Charity. David promotes the

CE picture LOUISE O'CALLAGHAN 070619LOC12

Making cure available

The long-term aim of Killing Cancer is to have photodynamic therapy (PDT) treatments approved for eight major cancers and medical conditions by 2012.

Research is also needed to work on PDT alternatives for treating MRSA, arterial disease and brain tumours.

Broadcaster Sir David Frost is spearheading the £50 million fund-raising campaign for the charity, which could lead to cheaper, less invasive treatment of lung, breast and oesophageal patients.

PDT has been approved for several years to treat skin cancer, head and neck cancer, mouth cancer and the pre-cancerous condition in the gullet known as Barrett's oesophagus. It also treats patients suffering from age-related macular degeneration (AMD) that can

lead to blindness.

Part of the campaign is also designed to lobby health practitioners in the NHS to include PDT among its treatment options.

Charity founder and director Continues Longman: "Here we have a cancer treatment that is dramatically cheaper than the established treatments. You would think that Patricia Hewitt and her colleagues in the NHS would be embracing PDT with open arms, yet for head and neck and oesophageal patients, there are still fewer than 10 hospitals across the UK offering it."

Professor Stephen Bown, director of the National Medical Laser Centre at University College Hospital in London: "It is realistic that PDT could be approved for treating several different cancers and

medical conditions, including cancers of the pancreas, bile duct, prostate and cervix. In some countries, it is already approved for early lung cancer and we are optimistic that we can make a real impact on breast cancer as well.

"We have spent more than 20 years making painfully slow progress to deliver PDT solutions to patients, slowly because of a chronic lack of funds.

"With Sir David's support, we have a realistic chance of getting the funding that will allow us to deliver the essential PDT options that will benefit patients in the UK and around the world."

Patients wanting details of their nearest PDT centre and details of the new trials can visit website: www.killingcancer.co.uk



Posed by models

Photodynamic treatment (PDT) is used for some types of cancer. It may also be used to treat some non-cancerous conditions of the skin or eye.

PDT uses laser, or other light sources, combined with a light-sensitive drug (sometimes called a photosensitising agent) to destroy cancer cells.

A photosensitising agent is a drug that makes cells more sensitive to light. Once in the body, the drug is attracted to cancer cells. It does not do anything until it is exposed to a particular type of light. When the light is directed at the area of the cancer, the drug is activated and the cancer cells are destroyed. Some healthy, normal cells in the body will also be affected by PDT, although these cells will usually heal after the treatment.

In cancers that are being treated at an early stage, the aim of treatment may be to try to cure the cancer.

The aim of PDT for advanced cancer is usually to reduce symptoms by shrinking the tumour. In this situation, PDT cannot cure a cancer.

Photodynamic therapy treatments for some cancers, such as prostate and pancreas, are still the subjects of research.

PDT can safely be given to patients who have had other cancer treatments, such as surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy.

FACT FILE What is photodynamic treatment?