

Patient story: Skin cancer

Beverley Moy

KILLING  cancer

Beverley gets her treatment of choice

If Beverley Moy's local GP and hospital consultants in Preston and Manchester had had their way, she would now be missing part of her nose and cheek, while the tear duct on her right eye would permanently leak down her face. Two years ago she had been diagnosed with having skin cancer, yet her fight to get her treatment of choice has been exhausting.

Her story is littered with two specialist surgeons, two dermatologists and three GPs telling her that surgery was the only option for her basal cell carcinoma. Yet the former singer, dancer and hair stylist had discovered a therapy that everyone in her medical circle was intent on dismissing.

She says: "I was told by one GP that his Father had just had the same treatment for his rodent ulcer – another name for a basal cell carcinoma skin cancer. It was in the same place as mine where my glasses rubbed on the side of my nose. It was removed surgically. Apparently he was delighted with the outcome and didn't think that a permanently weeping tear duct was a bad price to pay for removing his cancer."

"When I explained what I knew about PDT from the internet and articles in the papers, I was told that too many people were going on the internet finding out about things that wouldn't work for them," she recalls.

Beverley is one of the first patients who found out about PDT from the publicity generated by the KILLING Cancer charity – formed in July 2005 to alert cancer patients of the many PDT options for the treatment of cancer. "When I got the first email saying that they would be able to treat me on the NHS, I just wept with joy that someone was listening to me and taking me seriously. I told my specialist to have a look at the KILLING Cancer website and talk to them about PDT. They didn't."

Beverley believes that the basis for their judgement was simply ignorance and out-dated information about PDT and its capabilities. "I can understand about specialists not knowing about a new treatment, but I do get angry when their minds seem to be totally shut to listening and finding out."

"Until I met Colin Hopper, a senior skin cancer specialist and surgeon at the National Medical Laser Centre at University College Hospital, I was continually told by dermatologists and my GP that PDT was only suitable for smaller cancers – nothing as big as I had. Colin disagreed."

"Even when I gave my GP in Blackpool all the paperwork about PDT, he still was indifferent and told me that surgery was the best option. I was wasting my time – he said."

"They thought that surgery was the only viable option and were not prepared to look for anything else and just wanted to operate and wreck my face with surgery. Their minds were closed to anything different. In the end, I became very annoyed and insisted that I get referred. I have no idea what they will think now the cancer has gone and my skin is perfect again."

"I also wonder what the Father of my GP will think. He took his son's advice. I wasn't prepared to listen to people whose minds appeared to be closed to anything new."

Beverley was treated with her PDT at the start of January 2006, and the initial healing process is now complete. She came to London for the drug injection with Foscan, followed three days later by the light treatment that activated the drug to starve the cancer cells of the oxygen they needed to live.

While she was told that she might experience some pain as the cancer cells died and the regeneration of normal tissue began, she never needed any of the pain killers provided. "Despite pressing for PDT, there was always the feeling at the back of my mind that perhaps my consultants at home were right. Perhaps Colin and his team were building up my hopes that would then be dashed."

"Six weeks on, and there is no sign of the cancer, and the original lump on my face has disappeared. I can't really explain how I feel. It's more than just relief. It is also more than just anger. It's not just the satisfaction that I have battled and that I have won for myself. I had the treatment I wanted, and I have the result that I wanted."

"I don't have a scar. I don't have a hole to be patched up and the need for plastic surgery. I can look in the mirror and it's as if the cancer was just a bad dream and never a reality."

Beverley has yet to go back to see her consultants. She has yet to see her GP. "Quite honestly, I don't know what I'll say to him when I do. More important than what I say is what they say the next time someone tells them that they want PDT for a skin cancer or one of the other cancers that PDT seems to treat so successfully."

As with any cancer, Beverley knows that it may come back. She also knows that if it ever does, she knows she'll be back to see Colin Hopper at the National Medical Laser Centre for a second PDT treatment.

"Anything's better than the emotional and physical scars of surgery," she adds. "Perhaps the announcement from NICE will mean that people like me will not, in the future, have to face such an apparently impossible battle to be treated with PDT."

