

Patient Case Study (15) John Deas



John begins his escape from a lifetime of pain and facial abnormality – and PDT was the only possible solution

John Deas has lived with his congenital vascular malformation – a blood vessel growth on the side of his tongue that has also pushed out the side of his neck. To those with a medical background, it's called a hemangioma.

“It was never going to kill me, and when I was a youngster my Mum said that she was relieved that I had it – and not my sister. Men are not supposed to be so concerned about how they look, but for a woman it would be devastating,” says the chartered surveyor from North London.

For all his 66 years the growth has become larger, with a blue patch staining his neck. The longer it has grown, the more uncomfortable it has become.

“Surgeons that I met could see the increasing problems I was having breathing. The problem with surgery was the risk that they would not be able to control the bleeding. Unlike a vein, you couldn't simply tie off each end and remove it,” says John.

It was in 2005 that Colin Hopper, a maxillo facial surgeon at University College Hospital in London, mentioned the idea of PDT – Photodynamic Therapy. It could perhaps start to destroy the tumour – or at the very least restrict its future growth. PDT works through a combination of drug and light that destroys target cells by depriving them of oxygen.

PDT has been used by Mr Hopper for many years to destroy cancers head, neck and mouth cancers, but for him this was a new challenge to destroy blood vessel problems.

“In this case, it is a question of taking the treatment stage by stage. We followed the model developed by the Chinese many years ago, but it is still an experimental procedure in the UK and we wouldn't go at this sort of new concept without being very cautious,” says Mr Hopper.

While the hope is that one day funds will be available to launch a full trial of this radical use of PDT, John's step-by-step destruction of his tumour is delighting John and his wife, Natasha.

“I have now had five treatments, and with each one you can see the difference, and the whole technique is being improved with new scanners and with the added confidence of Colin and his entire team.

“Today, the pressure on the wind pipe has really improved it, and the plan is to be more ambitious with their drug and light dose next time. I am one of a small group of patients who have had PDT for similar vascular malformations, and for all of us the results have been quite brilliant.

“Radiotherapy is the other option that I am told that some other patients have had, but from what I am told the results are not as good, and the treatment really takes it out of you. The PDT is easy, and not really painful.

“I’ve waited all my life to get a treatment that works for me. I don’t suppose Colin will ever be able to get rid of it completely, but who am I to say? It is working for me and has completely changed my life.”

Ends

Further information from David Longman, Director, KILLING Cancer

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