

Patient story: Skin cancer

Kim Wuyts

KILLING  cancer

Kim comes through her skin cancer scare with only emotional scars

Kim Wuyts from Worthing in Sussex, found her world turned on its head four years ago when she was told that she had skin cancer on her nose. To realise that a small area of flaking white cells on her nose was so serious, was a real blow for her. At first she was told it wasn't a problem, until a second opinion arrived unexpectedly one day from a locum at her local surgery.

She put the cancer down to family skiing holidays when, as a youngster, it was perceived as highly desirable to return to school with a healthy tan. These days, Kim's only tan comes from a bottle.



The treatment for all skin cancers has always been a choice of chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery.

All can result in terrible disfigurement that can only be repaired in part with skin grafts. Even then, the process is usually slow, repeated and painful.

In Kim's case, the recommended treatment was surgery. They would start with a small section to hopefully cut away the cancer and, if that was not successful, they might have to go further and take away more tissue. In more severe cases, the surgeon's knife would remove the entire nose.

As Kim faced up to the surgery, like others of this generation she started to search the internet. She also gained more knowledge about the surgical issues and pitfalls.

If the surgery was required, grafts could be taken from behind her ear, or in the case of the removal of her nose, more extensive cosmetic surgery could take place in time, involving taking skin and flesh from her forehead and stretching it to cover whatever framework the plastic surgeons had in mind.

As the discussions and tests continued, her network of friends started to provide her with details of PDT – Pho-

to-dynamic Therapy. Her internet searches led her to different medical teams, including one in Scandinavia.

Encouraged by this new supply of information, Kim made contact with the former head teacher at her eldest daughter's school. She had been in a similar position to Kim, and having had her nose removed to eradicate her cancer, she passed the message back down the line that Kim should do all she could to be treated with PDT.

Kim tried discussing the PDT route with her GP, only to realise that she knew more about PDT than her family doctor.

With three days to go before she was due to have the surgery, Kim made the breakthrough when she made a call to Cancer Research UK. She was given the name and number for Colin Hopper, the facial skin cancer specialist at the National Medical Laser Centre.

To cut a long story shorter, Kim's cancer was destroyed by the PDT. The therapy of injecting a light sensitive drug into the cancer, and then activating the drug with a very low powered light, is all that is required for the cancer to be killed. The process cuts off the oxygen supply to the cancer cells, and they die, and within weeks the body makes a full recovery.

Unlike other more commonly talked-about cancer treatments, there is no use of lasers or toxic drugs that can damage the immune system. There is no heat and no burning. No surgery is required at all.

In June 2005, she returned to the Laser Centre for her latest regular check up, and was told that she was still all clear.

Cosmetically, you would never know that Kim's nose or face has had a skin cancer removed. The contours of her nose – inside and out – are exactly as they were before the cancer took hold.

Kim is still left with some important questions.

Why, if PDT is as effective as she has discovered, isn't it promoted to all patients, and PDT not promoted to all GPs and medical centres?

Why, if the KILLING Cancer charity needs funds to develop PDT for other cancers, isn't the money being made available to fast-track the research?

KILLING Cancer is asking the same questions, and it is hoped will soon be securing the answers.