

## Patient story: Barrett's Mark Kingston

KILLING  cancer

### Mark Kingston gets a bus home after PDT treatment

Mark Kingston got the bus back to Richmond in Surrey when he was allowed home after his Photodynamic Therapy (PDT) treatment at the National Medical Laser Centre at University College Hospital in London. "I shouldn't have done it, but I felt so incredibly well after the treatment," he says.

"I wasn't in any pain, and I certainly wasn't light-sensitive. I really think it was a way of celebrating the fact that I had escaped from having the most dreadful surgery," says the former actor.

Mark had been diagnosed with Barrett's Oesophagus, an acid reflux condition that currently strikes over 8,000 men and women a year in the UK. In roughly half the cases it can be stabilised by a cocktail of daily pills and drugs.



The other half are on a collision course with oesophageal cancer and a visit to the surgeon. For them, the prognosis is the removal of their oesophagus (their gullet) and most of their stomach, and from the healthy remnants a new swallowing tube is constructed that gives them some quality of life.

They would be in hospital for 10 days, and maybe off work for months as they get used to coping with life without a stomach.

Mark had been warned of the surgical consequences when his Barrett's began to deteriorate. "It is utterly disgusting what most patients in my condition are put through. I couldn't believe that this was to be my fate," says the man who took his final acting curtain call in 2000.

He was expecting a happy retirement from years spent in TV and theatre, paying opposite such

greats as Kenneth Williams, Peter Ustinov, Albert Finney, Vivien Leigh and Sir Alec Guinness. His CV is long and impressive, and included the first stage version of Willie Russell's *Educating Rita*, playing opposite Julie Walters (see picture) who would go on to have fame with the film version with Michael Caine.

His TV credits include *Shine* on Harvey Moon, *Beryl's Lot* and *No Job For A Lady* for ITV – in the latter he starred with Penelope Keith and George Baker.

"It was my specialist at Roehampton who told me that Dr Laurence Lovat was working on a new treatment at the National Medical Laser Centre. He told me that it didn't involve surgery, and that I would be in and out in a few days. It was the only hospital offering it.

"I went into hospital one morning, and that afternoon I had three small cups of a liquid to drink about an hour apart. A few hours later they gave me mild sedation and a small light was put down my throat. It didn't seem to take very long.

"I remember thinking at the time that it was all pretty simple, compared to hours of surgery. It was utterly painless and I was in absolutely no discomfort at any stage. I was 'in', 'out' and 'away' from the hospital in absolutely no time at all. Just four days.

"I suppose part of me wondered if it could be doing me any good when other patients with the same condition are being ripped apart. But at every step along the way I was told that I should be fine.

"What I don't understand is why I was so incredibly lucky. I was able to have a treatment that was so brilliant, while thousands of other people don't have bright and enthusiastic GPs and specialists who really know their stuff. They are having their stomachs and gullets destroyed by a surgeon. Why?"