

# Patient story: Vascular tumour

## Teri Hargreaves

KILLING  cancer

## Teri follows Louise for vascular PDT treatment

One of the problems with having a rare medical condition is that nobody has a definitive answer' "You could try this," says one. "No, I think this could work," says the next. If you consult a third, the picture becomes more and more confusing.

When you're a child, the jumbled mass of advice seems hard to grasp and comprehend. For Mum and Dad, they have the ultimate responsibility of deciding.

Do you let the surgeon 'have a go', or try some other option that you are told 'might work'. What we all need in life is some sense of certainty. A guarantee. Even odds that seem stacked in your favour.

Teri Hargreaves is a lady who seemed to share all these dilemmas. "As a child I had never been able to straighten my fingers in my left hand. When I was younger I never really thought anything about. I had always been active and danced a lot, and life seemed to present no major crises. But I did have an ache. A constant ache in my arm.



"When I was younger I never went to the doctors as I felt a little silly going with a pain in my arm and never really thought that my fingers were such a big deal."

By the time Teri went to the University of Chester to read biology, she noticed again how her left hand would never open. Some new friends teased her about it. "Even when I tried to push my hand to open, the fingers still wouldn't go. Since I had stopped dancing the pain was getting worse through my lower left arm. I guess that dancing was somehow helping, but the freedom I found while dancing really just masked the problem," she says.

"I also noticed how much bigger my left arm was compared to my right one where there was a hard lump beneath my elbow," she recalls.

"I decided to go to the Doctor to get it checked out, and I was referred to a specialist who diagnosed me having a haemangioma - a vascular tumour."

The options she was given was either to operate - which would cause a lot of scarring and she was told that the tumour would probably grow back - or to have injections that would shrink the veins within the tumour, trying to burn them out.

That hope was dashed when, after seeing more detailed scans, another specialist ruled this out as the tumour was too big and tangled for them to provide any great improvement to Teri.

Three years on from the latest round of investigations, and Teri finding the pain reaching almost unbearable proportions, the young lady was getting desperate. "Any little knock or bang on my arm would cause it to hurt so much. The only painkillers I was told to use weren't working anymore and the Doctors still

didn't want to operate," she recalls.

Teri's life changed when a work friend, Carol Hadcroft, told her about a feature she's seen on ITV's This Morning with Dr Chris Steele, Phillip Schofield and Fern Britton.

"Within minutes I had logged on to the This Morning website, and sat their open-mouthed watching this lady describe my life story, but using her name! The only difference was that she had a happy ending, and had found a treatment in London that didn't destroy her muscles and tendons, and obviously wouldn't leave me with a huge scar. It had apparently killed the tumour for her," she says.

The treatment was Photodynamic Therapy (PDT) and involved being injected with what is a green pigment originally developed from pond algae - chlorophyll. It kills tumour cells when a red light is applied to the tumour.

"I contacted the KILLING Cancer charity mentioned on the programme, and things really started to happen very quickly. I was in London meeting the man who had treated the girl on the TV - Colin Hopper. He looked at the scans and told me that that the treatment would be perfect for me.

"There were so many thoughts spinning through my head. I didn't dare believe that this treatment could really work for me, and that I might one day be pain free and begin to live a more 'normal' life again.

"I was in hospital for just five days and there were no scars. The only thing to show for the procedure is four small 'dots' where the laser fibre optics had been inserted - and these have now faded.

Teri's Mum and Dad, Julie and Allan, helped her through all phases of the treatment, aware at first that they shouldn't build up their hopes of a successful outcome hopes having been dashed before. Friends at the Royal Bank of Scotland offices in Horwich where Teri works, also formed a close-knit support group, but in the end it was down to Teri to have to cope.

"How do I feel now? I'm still amazed by how simple everything was. The treatment went really smoothly, and while I had some pain in my arm for about three days, since then I have been totally pain free which is such a relief. It was the best 21<sup>st</sup> birthday present I could ever have had.

"I've been back to the hospital for a MRI scan which shows that the tumour is significantly smaller. After a lifetime of not being able to open my hand, I am having physiotherapy on my fingers and I have got the ability to open and close my hand for the first time in my life.

"People often ask me about what PDT is, and how it works. All I can say that it feels like I have received my own, very private little miracle. Nobody has ever heard about this treatment, and yet thanks to the work of the charity and Colin Hopper and his colleagues at University College Hospital in London, I now have a new lease of life and no longer feel like a freak or disabled."

Says Colin Hopper: "For someone like Teri who has been incapacitated for so many years, physiotherapy is going to need to stretch the muscles and tendons to give her back full hand use. While I used PDT to treat cancers in the head and neck, Teri's story is just one further step along the road to developing it for dozens of other tumours and cancers. For me and the rest of the team, we have achieved a perfect result where other treatment options seemed to fail her or be complicated by side-effects that could have been worse than the original problem."