

Patient Case Study (17) Tracy Jeeves



Tracy gets her oesophageal problems fixed with PDT, but she worries about the next generation and her son

Tracy Jeeves knew for 10 years that one day the surgeon might call her in to have her gullet and stomach removed, with her stomach lining being re-modelled into a new swallowing tube. Such drastic surgery would have changed her life, completely.

Tracy had something called Barratt's oesophagus – a pre-cancerous condition that turns into full oesophageal cancer for 10% of sufferers.

The Barratt's is caused by acid reflux – heartburn caused by stomach acid coming up through the gullet. Nobody knows exactly what increases the risks of getting Barratt's, but the common consensus is that alcohol and diet combine to accelerate the problem.

The rapid generational change in diet, combined with alcohol and exposure to cigarette smoke, is something that the body finds hard to respond to.

Barratt's is increasing most rapidly in Scotland, reaching levels that are troubling the medical profession. Today's teens and under 30s and their binge drinking mentality is a real cause for future concern. It is for other cancers, including throat and mouth.

For 21 years Tracy has worked in a bar restaurant in Farnham, Surrey. She sees what young people think is an acceptable way to lead their lives. "Knowing what I do now, it frightens me. It reminds me what I was like at their age, and of course I wonder if my lifestyle was anything to do with getting Barratt's.

Tracy knows the symptoms she has lived with, and her son's heartburn is a concern to her. "He keeps saying that there isn't a problem, and I hope that any publicity I get will encourage him to get a check. Barratt's doesn't care how old you are.

"I went to have a check when my own heartburn became a real problem for me. When cancer was mentioned I went into total shock. I was in denial for a long time, and just hoped that it wouldn't come my way. I shut my eyes and ears to what might happen," she says.

Tracy was able to take a regime of medication to help to reduce the symptoms, but specialists adopt a 'watch and wait' attitude with regular checks and biopsies.

In early 2009 a check showed that the Barratt's was beginning to enter its cancerous stage.

"I'd read about PDT on the internet, so when my specialist started to talk about surgery, I just went deaf. If my daughter hadn't been with me, I don't think I could have told you a word of what was said to me.

"I remember showing him the details about PDT that I'd printed out. I think it was just a lucky," she adds.

While no patient looks forward to any treatment, the PDT turned out to be the easiest thing in the world for Tracy to go through. "I think the whole time I kept thinking that it was much better than having the knife. I came home and after a couple of weeks I felt so well.

"The difference in me and my life is unbelievable. I have been clear for a year after just the one treatment, but if the cancer came back I would go for it again.

"I had felt so very ill before. The symptoms had gone a long way further than just heartburn. I never had a good day. I used to go to sleep at night having to sit up in bed;

Tracy doesn't understand why more patients with her condition are not made aware of PDT and that it isn't more widely available. "When other patients who could have PDT are being operated upon is just too dreadful to think of," she adds.

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Further information from David Longman, Director, KILLING Cancer

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