

## **Patient Case Study (21)**

### **Eric Lockyear**

Eric sees the light as surgery is cut out of his cancer options



Eric Lockyear started developing skin cancers 20 years ago. There were just one or two at first, and then the epidemic started and he reckons he's had hundreds over the years.

Eric spent most of his working life in Hong Kong, and as a result of years of overexposure to the sun, surgeons started cutting them out, one by one.

“My skin was starting to look like a battlefield with all the surgery,” he says. “The cancers weren’t just on my face, but over all of my body and legs. Now I know what the consequences are of my years of sun worshipping.

“The good advice about taking care in the sun is not something I took any notice of. The people I am really concerned about are today’s young people who are exposing themselves to potentially damaging UV rays or baking themselves on sunbeds. With the benefit of hindsight, my obsession with the sun was just crazy.

“No young woman – or man – would really want to go through what I have,” he adds. “But I know they will.”

The day that changed his life with skin cancer came when he made an appointment at The Royal Cornwall Hospital in Truro – where he lives today. He was asked if he had ever been offered Photodynamic Therapy.

No, he hadn’t, but the treatment he now describes as ‘magic’ is something that he looks back upon as one of the best health decisions he ever took.

Now he now enjoys robust good health and skin that hardly shows a blemish. “If I had carried on with surgery, I have no idea what I would look like,” he continues.

“PDT has changed my life,” Eric says. “I’ve had various types of skin cancer for over 20 years, as a result of over-fondness for the tropical sun. I’ve had dozens – actually it’s probably hundreds, if you count the little new ones – every type except melanoma.”

But what does the treatment involve? “I hope I can reassure people that it’s really very simple,” says Eric. “A cream is spread over the affected area, it is covered up and you go for lunch – you have to let it soak into the damaged skin for three hours. Then a lamp, like a sun lamp, is shone over the area for about eight or nine minutes. That’s all!”

“I do find it quite painful for just a few minutes,” he adds. “It’s rather like stinging nettles. Then your skin recovers over the next few days, as if you’ve got sunburn. Some people say they don’t feel any pain at all.”

There is no doubt that this is much better than the old treatments. “I’d have to have lots of bits of me cut out every couple of months, so often I’d come home from the clinic with 20 or 30 stitches,” Eric notes ruefully.

“Once, my wife took a look at the rows of stitches across my chest and said: “I’ll have to be gentle with you darling, or you’ll tear along the dotted line!”

Another major advantage of PDT is that whole areas of skin can be treated in one sitting, dealing with multiple new cancers and patches of pre-cancerous skin, thus preventing more new cancers from developing. With the old methods, each one would have to be cut out, one by one, over the years, with great pain for the patient and expense on the NHS system.

Eric spent over 30 years living in Hong Kong and spent most weekends out sailing. “I was mad keen, on both racing and cruising, so would spend weekend after weekend with my shirt off getting burnt. Of course, we didn’t realise back in the 60s and 70s what harm we were doing.”

“Nowadays, people shouldn’t be so silly,” he advises. “Put on sun cream and don’t overdo it and fry yourself.”

Eric worries that many people are scared of “the big C word” and don’t do anything about checking their skin. “If you see a spot or sore that doesn’t heal up normally, but just keeps irritating or weeping, go and see your local GP. It can’t do any harm and might save your life.”

He makes a surprising observation about who is at risk: “It’s not just blondes and gingers who need to be careful - I’ve seen Chinese and Indians with horrible skin cancer from too much sun.”

So Eric’s messages are clear: Don’t overdo the sun; go and see your doctor if you see anything unusual on your skin or that doesn’t heal; and be reassured that we have access to a wonderful treatment and staff to help us.