

PRESS RELEASE

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'INVISIBLE TATTOOS' COULD IMPROVE BODY CONFIDENCE AFTER BREAST CANCER RADIOTHERAPY

INVISIBLE TATTOOS could replace the permanent dark ink tattoos used to ensure that breast cancer patients having radiotherapy are treated in exactly the same spot during each session, according to results from a pilot study to be presented at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference today (Sunday) .*

Research suggests that the permanent pin prick marks made on the skin of women having radiotherapy reminds them of their diagnosis for years to come, reducing body confidence and self-esteem.

It's also more difficult to spot these tattoos in dark-skinned women, potentially leading to inconsistencies in the area being treated.

The NIHR-funded researchers, based at The Royal Marsden hospital in London, asked 42 breast cancer patients undergoing radiotherapy to rate how they felt about their body, before the treatment and one month later.

Half the women were offered fluorescent tattoos, only visible under UV light, while the other half had conventional dark ink tattoos.

The researchers found that 56 per cent of the women who had fluorescent tattoos felt better about their bodies one month after treatment, compared to only 14 per cent among those who received black ink tattoos.

Using fluorescent tattoos also made no difference to the accuracy of treatment and took only slightly longer to carry out, compared to conventional dark ink tattoos.

Steven Landeg, a senior radiographer from the Royal Marsden, who is presenting the data, said: "These findings suggest that offering fluorescent radiotherapy tattoos as an alternative to dark ink ones could help ameliorate the negative feelings some women feel towards their bodies after treatment. It's important to remember that body image is subjective and dark ink radiotherapy tattoos will affect patients differently, but we hope that these results will go some way towards making this a viable option for radiotherapy patients in the future."

Evelyn Weatherall, 62, Surrey, had six cycles of chemotherapy, followed by radiotherapy, after being diagnosed with breast cancer following routine mammography through the UK's breast screening programme.

She said: "I'd asked if I could be part of any kind of clinical trial during my treatment because I'd read about how successful they were proving to be. My doctors told me about the invisible tattoos they were pioneering at The Royal Marsden hospital and I was more than happy to take part. I had lost my hair during chemotherapy and felt that I didn't want another visible reminder of my cancer.

"I think I was one of the first to undergo this procedure and it really worked. There wasn't a mark on my skin after the radiotherapy planning. I was going to a wedding soon afterwards and knew I'd be able to wear an outfit that didn't make me feel self-conscious.

“It’s wonderful to think that I may have been a part of something that could become standard in the future.”

Professor Matt Seymour, NCRI’s clinical research director said: “With more than half of all cancer patients now surviving 10 years and beyond, it’s imperative that we do everything we can to reduce the long term impact of treatment on patients, including cosmetic changes.”

The study was funded by the NIHR Biomedical Research Centre at The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust and The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR).

ENDS

For media enquiries please contact Ailsa Stevens in the NCRI press office on 020 3469 8300 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

Notes to editors

* Landeg S. et al, Breast Radiotherapy: Invisible Tattoos for External References
Conference abstract: <http://conference.ncri.org.uk/abstracts/2014/abstracts/B291.html>

About the NCRI

- The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry. It’s role is to promote cooperation in cancer research.
- NCRI Partners are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; Children with Cancer UK; Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Prostate Cancer UK; Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health and Social Care Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; Welsh Government (National Institute for Social Care and Health Research); Worldwide Cancer Research (formerly the Association for International Cancer Research); Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.
- For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk

About the NCRI Cancer Conference

- The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK’s major forum for showcasing the best British and international cancer research.
- The Conference offers unique opportunities for networking and sharing knowledge by bringing together world-leading experts from all cancer research disciplines.
- The tenth NCRI Cancer Conference is taking place from 2–5 November 2014 at the BT Convention Centre in Liverpool.
- For more information visit conference.ncri.org.uk



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