

Transcript

Melanoma in young people

Dr Wendy McInally:

Hello and welcome to these three short podcasts. Today, we will be discussing young people, from 16 to 26 years of age, with melanoma, which is skin cancer.

I'm Wendy McInally, and I'm a Senior Lecturer Field Lead for Children and Young People's Nursing with The Open University.

Jack Brodie:

Hello, everyone. My name is Jack Brody. It's a pleasure to be here and join Wendy today. A bit about my background, I am 24 years old now, but when I was 16, about a month before my 17th birthday, I was diagnosed with melanoma, which Wendy mentioned is a form of skin cancer.

Over the last five or six years, I've been involved in a number of initiatives to help raise awareness of skin cancer in young people, focusing specifically on melanoma, and this is the latest in one of those efforts.

Dr Wendy McInally:

OK, Jack, just to get us started with our first podcast, which is Melanoma in Young People, can you tell me how aware of melanoma skin cancer you were before being diagnosed?

Jack Brodie:

Yeah, of course, Wendy. I think skin cancer was a term that I think everyone is familiar with. It's one of those big, scary words that I think we all try and avoid the best we can. So, skin cancer is something that, of course, I was very aware of.

Melanoma, specifically, was something that I had never heard of. It seemed very obscure, so when I heard the term, it came as a shock to me because, one, I didn't know it. And then when I found out it was a skin cancer, it felt like something that I should have known, but didn't. So, it felt like I had been robbed in some way. So, melanoma was something that I wasn't aware of at all when I was diagnosed.

Dr Wendy McInally:

OK. Thank you, Jack.

Jack Brodie:

And I think, Wendy, from myself to you, at that time, I was always very intrigued about the fact, is this something that's common amongst young people? Obviously, I was 16 at the time, and I think my first thing was to try and clamber to find, am I the only one? Would you say that it's common amongst young people, or was it a strange event for me to be diagnosed at 16?

Dr Wendy McInally:

So that's a very good question, Jack. So having been a pediatric oncology nurse, so looking after children and young people with cancer for over 25 plus years, I hadn't actually come across melanoma in children and young people until I was probably at a conference.

It was when I was in Australia, and there were quite a few children who had seemed to have succumbed to this disease there, and then again later in my own adult life where my own brother was diagnosed with melanoma. I hadn't actually really heard much about it.

So, in answer to your question, we know that melanoma is very common in the adult elderly population, but it is less common in young people.

It is definitely rare in children under the age of 16, but we are seeing increasing numbers of teenagers and young adults between 15 to 24 years of age being diagnosed with skin cancer, which is, as I said, malignant melanoma.

So, at the moment, in the United Kingdom, malignant melanoma is the third most common cancer in 15 to 24-year-olds.

Jack Brodie:

Oh, wow. I think that comes as a shock, because I think, at the time, I hadn't-- Immediately, when you're at that age, 16, I was in fifth year at high school, and you immediately look to people in your school, people that you might know of that have dealt with this thing.

And I think at that time, skin cancer was not high on the list, but it's really interesting to hear that it's obviously something that is there and it is obviously untapped, especially in schools. Because it was something that I remember speaking to teachers at the time, and they were as shocked as I was.

So, it wasn't just me, a young person, being surprised, it was adults around me and stuff that were being surprised as well. So, it's really interesting to hear that it is so high on that list.

Dr Wendy McInally:

OK. And for our last question under this podcast, Jack, what were the main signs and symptoms you experienced? So, what did you notice before, or prompting you to go to the doctor or the hospital?

Jack Brodie:

So, as I mentioned a couple of times, I was 16 at the time, and I found this spot on my neck, which in hindsight, it looked somewhat like a mole. But at the time, I just called it a spot. And at that time, I think I thought I had acne.

So, I tried to treat it with the usual stuff, and was putting Sudocrem on it, and other things to try and make it go away. And naively at that point, I thought it was, which is funny to think now, because I can pretty safely say that Sudocrem doesn't cure cancer.

But at the time, I was looking at this spot. And I think my mum was the first one to say, I think that's growing, Jack. And I thought my mum was just being a mum and looking out for me, and perhaps being a bit paranoid, but she encouraged me to go to the GP.

And initially, they had said, just keep an eye on it and we'll look out for what can happen. And that sort of went back and forth a couple of times. I ended up having to be pretty persistent, through the backing of my mum, who pushed me a couple of times to say, I think this is growing again.

And again, I thought my mum was being a little bit paranoid, but I went back to the GP a couple of times. Eventually, we managed to get into dermatology, and that was where we found that it wasn't just a spot that I'd be looking at, and it was in fact a mole. And that's when it led to getting some tests done.

Dr Wendy McInally:

So, you never experienced any pain or anything like that?

Jack Brodie:

There is no itchiness. I never felt like I had to scratch it or anything. It really was this-- It wasn't too raised, from what I can remember. It was pretty flat. It was more pink in color than it was brown, so a little bit different to a regular mole, and I think that's why I looked over it as being a mole or anything like that, a freckle.

So, there was no pain. I didn't feel like I had to itch it, because there was no itchiness. It really was just this thing that appeared on my skin overnight, and I wasn't too sure what to do. But I think, if there's any young people listening, I would say, listen to your mum if she's around, she always knows best.

And I think, trust your gut in these situations, because I think I maybe had some slight feeling that maybe this was slightly different, because it did start to grow. I'd always say, trust your gut in these instances.

And if you are unsure, go to your GP, but don't take that as the end goal. If your GP turns you away, fine, but keep an eye on that spot, because it can change, and these things can happen. It was something that happened to myself, and I'm so glad that I was able to have my mum around, looking over my shoulder to check everything that happened.