# Worcester woman’s rare mucosal melanoma diagnosis highlights importance of persistence and early detection



A 58-year-old woman from the outskirts of Worcester has shared her experience of being diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of skin cancer, mucosal melanoma, after initially being misdiagnosed with sinusitis. Wendy White, who works as a human resources manager, first sought medical help in December 2022 due to persistent nosebleeds. However, her family doctor dismissed her symptoms twice, attributing them to inflammation of the sinuses commonly caused by a cold.

Mrs White’s symptoms worsened in January 2023 when she expelled what she believed to be a blood clot from her nose, only to discover a jelly-bean shaped growth appearing in her nostril the following day. After insisting on an earlier appointment, she was referred to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist. Initially, the growth was thought to be a polyp, but after removal through private medical care to avoid a lengthy NHS waiting list, she received the shocking diagnosis that it was mucosal melanoma.

Further scans revealed that the cancer was at stage four, indicating it had metastasised to several other parts of her body, including her breast, lungs, and liver. This form of melanoma is rare, accounting for only about 2% of melanoma cases in the UK, with approximately 150 to 250 annual diagnoses. Mucosal melanoma originates in the mucous membranes lining body cavities such as the nose and mouth and can progress rapidly due to its ability to enter the bloodstream and affect multiple organs.

Mrs White described her shock at the diagnosis, stating: “It came completely out the blue. Never in a million years did I think they’d mention cancer. I was super fit. I used to run twice a week, go to the gym, do yoga, eat healthily.” Despite a full-body health check and a clear mammogram in late 2022, by January 2023, scans showed tumours not only in her nose but also small but rapidly growing tumours elsewhere. She underwent surgery in April 2023 to remove the primary tumour located near her brain, behind her eye, followed by over 25 rounds of immunotherapy.

Remarkably, Mrs White reports significant improvement following treatment, with tumours disappearing in response to immunotherapy. She explained to MailOnline that after initially detecting a golf ball-sized tumour in her breast, “Just eight months after beginning immunotherapy, there was absolutely nothing left of the tumour, it disappeared. It’s an amazing treatment if you respond well to it.”

In collaboration with the head and neck cancer charity Get A-Head, Mrs White is now advocating for greater awareness of the symptoms and importance of persistence in seeking medical advice. She emphasised: “If you truly believe there’s something wrong, pursue it. Just keep pushing and pushing and nagging. Listen to your gut feeling and don’t take no for an answer.”

Danni Heath, director of Get A-Head, highlighted the relevance of Mrs White’s message in light of a recent increase in head and neck cancer diagnoses. “Recent evidence suggests there is a concerning rise in the number of people being diagnosed with head and neck cancers so the more we can do to drive awareness the better. Wendy was right to continue seeking medical help when she knew things weren’t right and we would urge others to do the same.” She added that early diagnosis is crucial given that late detection remains one of the biggest risks associated with these cancers.

Mucosal melanoma poses diagnostic challenges because it occurs in less visible areas and does not always exhibit the pigment changes typical of other melanomas, often leading to diagnosis at an advanced stage. Common symptoms can include persistent hoarseness, difficulty swallowing, lumps in the neck, persistent sore throat, earache, nasal congestion, or nosebleeds.

Mrs White’s case underscores the importance of vigilance when symptoms persist, particularly in diseases with rising incidence rates, including melanoma among young and older adults. According to Cancer Research UK, while melanoma rates have increased by over 60% among 25- to 49-year-olds since the 1990s, they are also rising in older age groups. Mucosal melanomas have no clearly identified risk factors such as genetics or UV exposure.

As she continues her treatment journey, Mrs White remains determined to raise awareness of this rare cancer and support efforts to improve early diagnosis and care for others facing similar battles.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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