# Nail technician’s vigilance leads to life-saving kidney disease diagnosis



Beauticians and hair professionals often occupy a unique position in our lives, not just offering aesthetic services but also holding the potential to save lives. This was vividly illustrated in the case of Louise Whymark, a 35-year-old customer service assistant from Harwich, Essex. Recently, Louise's story emerged of how a seemingly innocuous brown mark on her big toe led to life-saving medical intervention, all thanks to the vigilance of her nail technician.

In January 2022, Louise noticed a strange brown mark on her toenail. "It didn't look right," she recalled, yet she hesitated to consult a doctor, dismissing it as minor. Instead, an instinct urged her to send a photograph of the mark to her trusted nail technician, with whom she had built a long-standing rapport over the years. The technician recognised the potential seriousness of the situation, advising Louise to seek medical attention due to the possibility that such marks could signify deeper underlying issues.

This pivotal moment led Louise to her GP, whose subsequent tests revealed alarming results: her kidneys were operating at only 25% capacity. Professor Simon Davies, a consultant nephrologist at the University Hospital of North Midlands, emphasised the often "silent" nature of chronic kidney disease, explaining that it frequently lacks obvious symptoms. As a consequence, signs such as unusual nail changes can be significant indicators of more serious health problems. "When kidney disease occurs, the body struggles to eliminate waste products effectively," he noted, stressing the importance of immediate medical evaluation in the presence of unexplained changes like those seen in nails.

Following her diagnosis, Louise was found to have IGA nephropathy, a condition resulting in kidney inflammation. The severity of her situation was underscored by an extremely high blood pressure reading of 213/100, which placed her at risk of stroke. Thankfully, she is now receiving dialysis three times a week while waiting for a transplant. Reflecting on her experience, she stated, "If it hadn't been spotted when it was, I’d be in a far worse state. I’m so thankful to my nail technician. I believe she saved my life."

Louise’s experience underscores the broader implications of the training programmes offered to beauty professionals, particularly those provided by charities such as Skcin. This organisation has taken significant strides in equipping beauticians and hairdressers with the knowledge needed to spot early signs of skin cancer and other serious health conditions. With skin cancer being the most commonly diagnosed cancer in the UK, affecting thousands each year, this training represents a crucial line of defence. Courses under the Melanoma and Skin Cancer Early Detection (MASCED) initiative are designed for beauty professionals who regularly observe their clients closely, giving them a unique opportunity to identify abnormalities that might otherwise go unchecked.

Awareness and education are lauded as vital tools in combating the alarming statistics surrounding skin cancer. According to Cancer Research UK, melanoma alone claims over 2,400 lives annually in the UK, despite 86% of cases being preventable with early intervention. Schemes targeting beauticians are particularly significant as they connect with demographics who may not frequently access healthcare, particularly younger women who might only visit salons rather than doctors.

Moreover, the challenge of recognising melanoma is particularly acute among people with darker skin types, as conditions such as acral melanoma can present differently and may often be overlooked. Campaigns like the Beauty Spotters initiative specifically address these disparities, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive approaches in skin health education.

The integration of health awareness into the beauty industry epitomises a proactive model of care, ultimately offering clients a dual benefit: aesthetics and health. By prioritising education and training for beauty professionals, we not only empower them to take action but also create a ripple effect of awareness among the public. As Louise's case vividly demonstrates, the stakes can be extraordinarily high, with the potential for beauticians to be the catalysts for diagnosis and treatment of life-threatening conditions.

As we continue to unravel the intersecting realms of beauty and health, it becomes increasingly clear that vigilance, informed by robust training, can and does save lives.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7
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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14719401/This-strange-mark-big-toe-nail-technician-told-checked-saved-life.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.skcin.org/> - Skcin is the UK's leading skin cancer awareness charity specializing in the prevention and early detection of skin cancer through educational intervention. Their mission is to save lives and reduce suffering from melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancer by preventing the disease, improving patient outcomes through early diagnosis, and reducing the burden on the NHS. Skcin offers a comprehensive range of resources and five bespoke accreditation programs targeting high-risk and influential audiences, including primary schools, pre-schools, employers of outdoor workers, the hair and beauty industry, and allied healthcare professionals. Skin cancer is the most common and fastest rising cancer in the UK, with over 210,000 cases of non-melanoma skin cancers diagnosed annually. According to Cancer Research UK, 1 in 36 UK males and 1 in 47 UK females will be diagnosed with melanoma during their lifetime. Education is key to reversing these statistics, helping the nation understand the risks associated with UV exposure and advising them on how to take charge of their own skin health and surveillance. To find out more about the charity Skcin, visit: https://skcin.org To find out more about our national accreditation programs visit: https://sunsafeschools.co.uk https://sunsafenurseries.co.uk https://sunsafeworkplaces.co.uk https://masced.uk https://pro.masced.uk Together we can make a difference and save lives.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-44469959> - Beauty therapy students at Nottingham College are being taught how to spot the signs of skin cancer. According to Cancer Research UK, 86% of melanoma cases are preventable, but despite this, there are more than 2,400 deaths from melanoma every year. Representatives from Skcin (The Karen Clifford Melanoma & Skin Cancer Charity) are visiting schools and colleges across the UK to raise awareness of the early signs and symptoms of skin cancer and to promote the early detection of melanoma. Students were taught the 'ABCDE rule' - a common screening tool used to compare the characteristics of normal moles against melanoma.
4. <https://news.sky.com/story/hairdressers-and-beauty-workers-to-be-first-line-of-defence-against-skin-cancer-11257580> - Hairdressers and beauticians are being trained to spot the first signs of skin cancer in their clients. Melanoma is one of the most common cancers in people aged 15 to 34, and it is hoped the new course could help detect unusual growths and lesions. While people in this age group do not usually visit their GP on a regular basis, many do get their hair cut or styled every few months. The free MASCED programme (melanoma and skin cancer early detection) is being offered by the Karen Clifford Skin Cancer Charity - known as Skcin for short. Skcin's website describes it as 'valuable training to the estimated 250,000 people working across the hair, health and beauty industry', providing a 'vital first line of defence against this deadly and devastating disease'.
5. <https://www.lbbonline.com/news/beauty-spotters-tackles-racial-disparities-in-skin-cancer> - Melanoma UK and T&Pm have launched the 'Beauty Spotters' campaign to raise awareness of Acral Melanoma, the most common form of skin cancer in Black and Brown skin. Acral Melanoma is unique in that it isn’t related to sun exposure, is difficult to diagnose, and often misdiagnosed. The first signs often appear under the nails, so T&Pm have created the Beauty Spotters Toolkit - a nail sticker kit which showcases the watch-out signs of Acral Melanoma, with a handy information pack. Dr. Sharon Belmo, consultant dermatologist for the campaign, said, 'Raising awareness of acral melanoma through the visual medium of nail stickers means people can become familiar with the signs to look out for. Medical conditions can present differently in darker skin types and due to the focus on white skin in western dermatology, conditions which affect people with Skin of Colour can often be underrepresented or overlooked'.
6. <https://professionalbeauty.co.uk/site/newsdetails/Detect-early-signs-skin-cancer-beauty-therapist> - Beauty professionals have regular, close-up observation of their clients’ skin, so are uniquely placed to identify potential abnormalities and provide signposting for professional clinical assessment. Early detection, diagnosis, and treatment can help to avoid surgery, improve patient outcomes, and, most importantly, save lives. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the UK. Statistics reveal that one in four men and one in five women will be diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer, and one in 36 men and one in 47 women will develop melanoma – the most serious, life-threatening form of skin cancer. Basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma, collectively known as non-melanoma skin cancer, is the most common form, usually occurring on areas of skin frequently exposed to UV radiation. Signs and symptoms of non-melanoma skin cancer include: A sore or rough patch of reddish, irritated skin that isn’t healing. There are many other types of skin cancer with very varied appearances. It’s therefore important to learn more about the various types and how they present. That is why specialist skin cancer charity Skcin developed the MASCED (Melanoma And Skin Cancer Early Detection) training programme. Designed to harness the power of the beauty professional in their capacity to help tackle this major public health concern, the training is supported, endorsed, and accredited by key industry bodies. There are two training courses available – MASCED for hair, health and beauty professionals, and MASCED Pro for advanced beauty professionals, allied health professionals, and medical practitioners. For an exclusive 10% discount on the training courses, enter the promo code PROBEAUTY10.
7. <https://www.scratchmagazine.co.uk/feature/how-i-spotted-a-sign-of-skin-cancer-on-my-salon-clients-nail/> - A beauty professional shares an experience where she spotted a dark brown/black vertical line in a client's nail plate, which can be a sign of skin cancer. After urging the client to seek medical advice, the client was diagnosed with skin cancer. The beauty professional emphasizes the importance of being equipped with knowledge to identify potential signs and recommend clients to seek medical advice. She updates her MASCED (Melanoma And Skin Cancer Early Detection) training regularly, which is a nationally accredited programme offered by Skcin, a UK charity dedicated to the prevention and early detection of skin cancer.