

Isle of Man Government



Noble's Hospital's Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Department recently launched a patient-led support group bringing together head and neck cancer patients in the Isle of Man to share best practices and personal experiences. The side effects of the conditions and the treatment such as difficulties associated with swallowing, eating, drinking and speech are what prompted the group to name themselves 'The Manx Swallows'.

The Manx Swallows is a patient-led group, supported by the medical professionals at Noble's Hospital who put patients in touch with the group.

Under the leadership of Mr Richard Hogg, ENT Consultant, the ENT team identified that newly diagnosed head and neck cancer patients and their families needed a long-term support solution such as talking with existing and recovered patients who are willing to share their experiences. The group is led by patients who have been diagnosed with mouth, throat, nose, thyroid, tonsil or similar cancers. Symptoms of head and neck cancers can include a lump or sore (for example, in the mouth) that does not heal, a sore throat that does not go away, difficulty swallowing, and a change or hoarseness in the voice. However, these symptoms may be caused by a medical condition that is not cancer. Anyone concerned about a symptom or sign on this list, should talk to their GP.

Mr Hogg said:

'The patient-led group will be able to provide valuable patient feedback to improve healthcare and treatment delivery for patients suffering from head and neck cancer. Head and neck cancers pose very specific challenges, both physical and psychological, because of the type and location of the cancer and the prescribed treatment. Models used in the UK and research shows that new patients find it very useful to meet other patients to understand what is normal and how to cope.'

Doreen Wilkinson, ENT Nurse Specialist, said:

'Following diagnosis of head and neck cancer, the treatment chosen will be one or more of a combination of radiotherapy, chemotherapy and surgery. The treatment itself can be very tough. Common side effects of treatment are usually difficulties associated with swallowing, eating and drinking as well as soreness in the mouth, loss of taste and trouble speaking, although with time most of these improve.'

The inaugural meeting of The Manx Swallows took place in August, with the Rotary Club of Douglas generously providing the start-up funding and agreeing to be the group's Patron.

John Beckett, Rotarian of The Rotary Club of Douglas and a tonsillar cancer patient, said:

'At our first 'get-together' it proved difficult to stop everyone talking to each other all at once. Such was the demand for exchanging experiences and in reality after a while it tended to split up into smaller groups talking between themselves leaving little time to eat the delicious food!

'Knowing the group exists on the Island has been well received by some patients as a psychological boost to themselves and families although they may not attend in person. The exchange of experiences and learning between everyone was excellent.'

A leaflet for The Manx Swallows with information and contact details is available at Noble's Hospital, Dental and GP Practices, and online at www.gov.im/selfcare.
