



## LOCKDOWN NO OBSTACLE AS SURREY CANCER SUPPORT GROUP CONTINUES TO BRING IN NEW MEMBERS

- *MelaNoMore – one of the only groups of its kind in the country – helps people who have had a melanoma diagnosis*
- *More than 60 members benefit from the advice and expertise of healthcare professionals from St Luke's Cancer Centre in Guildford*
- *Despite lockdown – and the deaths of four of the original seven founding members – the Macmillan-backed group has gone from strength to strength and continues to provide a welcoming environment*

A Surrey-based support group for people who have had melanoma – one of the first of its type in the UK – is continuing to grow and bring in new members, despite the pandemic.

MelaNoMore was set up to provide a safe space for people affected by melanoma to meet regularly and discuss the issues they were facing at diagnosis, through treatment and beyond.

Using a support grant and advice from Macmillan Cancer Support in 2018 plus the expertise on offer at St Luke's Cancer Centre in Guildford, the group now has more than 60 members – despite having to put all face-to-face meetings on hold for the best part of a year.

Co-founder and retiring chairman of MelaNoMore, Paul Duhig, said: "People need the chance to talk through the feelings and emotions that come with a melanoma diagnosis.

"People can ask questions of others in the same boat – they may have technical questions but they might also be looking for a bit of social contact, especially now.

"Others who get in touch are worried about their partners who might have had a diagnosis or are going through treatment.

"Our peer-to-peer support started as face to face with group gatherings and individuals meeting, but the Covid-19 crisis meant we had to move from 'tea and chat' meetings to virtual cafes online. We have a combination of professional speakers holding clinical sessions followed by a social time including quizzes and discussions about a range of topics.

"Our website [www.melanomore.net](http://www.melanomore.net) has a lot of helpful information and links with a number of charities and organisations that can help."

Paul helped establish the group after his own melanoma diagnosis in 2016 went to Stage 4 and end of life care, before treatment worked and turned the tide. He was put on a combined

radiotherapy/immunotherapy course and after two years of intense treatment has been passed as clear of cancer and is in remission.

He added: "The support from Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Trust's St Luke's Cancer Centre, the Fountain Centre based at the hospital, and Macmillan were key in getting going.

"MelaNoMore now provides a Buddy system for one-to-one support with Buddies helping those who are new to cancer treatment. As melanoma patients, we understand that receiving the diagnosis can be a frightening, confusing and isolating experience and that one-to-one support from someone who has faced the same thing is crucial."

Sadly, four of the original seven people who got MelaNoMore off the ground – Lisa Roberts (nee Bailey), Kim Crawley, Geoffrey Chapples and Simon Westcott – have since died.

One of the keys to the group's success is the involvement of six clinical members from St Luke's including a consultant surgeon, three cancer nurse specialists and a research nurse. The group's clinical lead is Delia Sworm and her advice and contacts have helped greatly.

Paul is now standing down and has handed the lead to treasurer Doug Hollis who has also played a big part in establishing the group.

Donations from Lisa's family and friends have greatly helped support the group to the extent that it has now been able to return the original support grant of £2,840 given to it by Macmillan to fund MelaNoMore's initial start-up costs.

Mark Witcomb, Macmillan Engagement Lead for Surrey and Sussex said: "MelaNoMore is doing some fantastic work for people living with cancer in Surrey and is growing all the time.

"We're pleased to have offered support right from the start. Our Support Grant enables groups to get off the ground and provide mutual support for cancer patients and we're delighted it was useful in establishing this important piece of support.

"The fundraising environment for charities is extremely difficult at the moment and we are very grateful the committee has opted to return the grant now that it is on a more stable financial footing."

Paul added: "The Support grant was absolutely crucial in getting MelaNoMore started. It started our funding and got us going in that first few months, it wouldn't have worked without it."

Delia Sworm, Macmillan Cancer Nurse Specialist, St Luke's Cancer Centre, Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust, said: "With MelaNoMore, we offer a chance for people to meet others with similar experiences who understand how they are feeling, share concerns and get advice.

"This can be invaluable when you are affected by cancer. Sometimes even the most supportive family members and friends cannot understand exactly how it feels to have cancer. In turn this can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

“Exchanging information and advice can help people gain a sense of control and reduce feelings of helplessness. There are many studies that have shown support groups help people with cancer feel less depressed and anxious. We are extremely grateful to Macmillan for their guidance and financial support.”

There are plans to widen the group’s support to cover all the hospitals working with St Luke’s Cancer Centre in Surrey, the South West London area, North West Sussex, and North Hampshire.

To learn more about MelaNoMore, go to <https://www.melanomore.net/>

### **What is melanoma?**

Melanoma (also called malignant melanoma) is a cancer that usually starts in the skin. It can start in a mole or in normal-looking skin.

About half of all melanomas start with a new, abnormal-looking mole in normal-looking skin. This usually looks like a dark area or a new mole that changes over weeks or months. Other melanomas develop from a mole that you already have.

It can be difficult to tell the difference between melanoma and a normal mole. The following checklist explains what to look for. It is called the ABCDE list:

**Asymmetry** – most melanomas are likely to be uneven or irregular in shape (asymmetrical). Ordinary moles are usually more even and both halves look mostly the same (symmetrical).

**Border** – the edges around a melanoma (border) are more likely to be uneven. Ordinary moles usually have a clear, smooth-edged border.

**Colour** – melanomas are usually more than one colour. They may have different shades, such as brown mixed with a black, red, pink, white or a blue tint. Normal moles usually only have shades of brown. If you have red or fair hair and pale skin, the melanoma may just be red with no brown.

**Diameter** – melanomas are usually more than 6mm wide. Normal moles are usually about the size of the blunt end of a pencil, or smaller. If you have lots of large moles, some of them may be larger than 5mm in diameter. These are likely to have been there for years without changing. But it is recommended that people with lots of moles and large moles get them checked by a dermatologist. This is important if you have had changes to moles in the past.

**Evolving** – look for changes in the size, shape or colour of a mole. The change in shape can include the area becoming raised or dome shaped. Or if the mole is flat it may stay that way but become wider.

**More information on melanomas is available on the [Macmillan website](#).**

ENDS

**For more information, please contact:**

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## **About Macmillan Cancer Support**

At Macmillan, we give people with cancer everything we've got. If you're diagnosed, your worries are our worries. We will move mountains to help you live life as fully as you can. And we don't stop there. We're going all out to find ever better ways to help people with cancer, helping to bring forward the day when everyone gets life-transforming support from day one.

We're doing whatever it takes. But without your help we can't support everyone who needs us. To donate, volunteer or raise money call 0300 100 200 or visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)