



Young mother turned to acupuncture

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Kelly MacKinnon's children were only 2 and 4 when she found a lump under her arm as she tried to scratch an itch in her armpit one day. She was enjoying a busy and active life, working full time and playing baseball.

MacKinnon, 35, who lives in Tiverton and works for a financial advisor, had surgery to have the lump removed in June 2000.

A specialist diagnosed metastatic malignant melanoma and said her prognosis was not good because this kind of cancer is usually fatal.

"He said there is no treatment and no cure for this. He told me to go home and pray that it doesn't come back," MacKinnon recalls. "The doctor told me I probably had five years left."

Within months, she found another lump. Doctors told her it was a secondary tumour, and that the primary source of the melanoma was elsewhere in her body. However, bone scans, CT scans, ultrasounds, mammograms and bloodwork did not reveal the source.

"The surgeon's answer was that we needed to remove all those lymph nodes to look for the source. It was a gamble. This had already ruined my baseball season, and I refused to have any further surgery."

Her family doctor told her there was nothing more they could do for her short of surgery, which would come with no guarantee that it could help.

She'd heard of an acupuncturist and traditional Chinese medicine doctor, Stanley Gwo-Wuu Shyu, who had formerly practised in her area, and she got in touch with him. He got back to her in February 2001 and she started to see him weekly, then twice a week. This involved a three-hour trip each way to his office in Scarborough.

"Dr. Shyu taught me exercises to push the lymphatic fluid through my body and relieve the pain. I was getting acupuncture, green tea, Chinese herbs and being taught exercises, which I did at home."

MacKinnon had acupuncture treatments weekly for the first month, twice a week for the next seven months, and back to once a week until summer 2002. After that, she cut back to once every three weeks or so. Early in 2003, she started to feel sick again, and returned to weekly acupuncture treatments.

"All the while I've been seeing Dr. Shyu I've continued to work full-time, play baseball twice a week from May to September, and raise my children, who are now 7 and 9."

Over the past three years the frequency of her treatments has fluctuated depending on how she is feeling. Now they are only monthly.

"I'm feeling fine now," she says. "I know deep down, that between Dr. Shyu and me, we saved my life. (In) December I had blood tests done at a walk-in clinic, and they showed that all my red and white blood cells are back in the normal range."

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