Editorial comment

It's time to save lives

It is a telling confession when a mouth cancer sufferer diagnosed her own condition from surfing the web. Speaking at the Houses of Parliament last week, guest speaker Lia Mills recalled her shocking journey. Her sister died from breast cancer three weeks after the diagnosis — that was had enough. Vigilant to the letter 'T', Lia had regular check-ups, but during each mammogram she had no idea that her own mouth was, as she put it, ‘eating me alive’. It all began with a ‘sore’ in her mouth that would not heal. Her first dentist told her she was unconsciously chewing her cheek and prescribed Bonjela. Her second dentist recommended replacing her old fillings. But still the sore continued. Extensive Internet research steered Lia towards the real problem — mouth cancer. After divulging her suspicions to her dentist (and this is the really shocking bit) he laughed, and said ‘no way’. Why did he laugh? Because her ‘profile’ did not match the ‘typical’ mouth cancer sufferer. By the time the mouth cancer was confirmed, it had spread to Lia’s lymph nodes and surgery began in haste. She had bone, skin and fat taken from her leg to rebuild her face. She had no idea that her own mouth cancer was, as she put it, ‘eating me alive’. It all began with a ‘sore’ in her mouth that would not heal. Her first dentist told her she was unconsciously chewing her cheek and prescribed Bonjela. Her second dentist recommended replacing her old fillings. But still the sore continued. Extensive Internet research steered Lia towards the real problem — mouth cancer. After divulging her suspicions to her dentist (and this is the really shocking bit) he laughed, and said ‘no way’. Why did he laugh? Because her ‘profile’ did not match the ‘typical’ mouth cancer sufferer. By the time the mouth cancer was confirmed, it had spread to Lia’s lymph nodes and surgery began in haste. She had bone, skin and fat taken from her leg to rebuild her face. 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