



SAM'S LEGACY HELPS SOUTHAMPTON RESEARCHERS PRODUCE VITAL INFORMATION FOR CHILDHOOD BRAIN TUMOUR TREATMENTS

Samantha Dickson was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 1994 and was treated at Southampton General Hospital. Despite a brave fight for life, she died a week before her seventeenth birthday in 1996.

In her memory her parents founded Samantha Dickson Brain Tumour Trust which is now the largest brain tumour charity in Europe.

One of the grants awarded by the Charity was to the medical team that treated Samantha. A grant of £200,000 over a seven year period was given to Professor Colin Kennedy, Professor in Neurology and Paediatrics at the University of Southampton. This research project has now produced vital information for the future treatment of children with medulloblastoma the most common malignant brain tumour in childhood.

The purpose of the study was to find out if there are any differences in the 'quality of life' between two groups of children and young people who were given different treatments for medulloblastoma.

The two treatments that were compared were given as two alternatives for treatment to children in the 1990's. One treatment consisted of radiotherapy after neurosurgery (RT) while the other included chemotherapy between neurosurgery and radiotherapy (RT+CT).

Eligible patients were identified (170) and 127 (75%), a remarkably high figure aged between 6 and 24, gave their consent to participate.

The major finding was that those who received chemotherapy were consistently found to have poorer scores on a series of well-validated questionnaires. This indicated poorer health status, more behavioural problems, less pro-social behaviour and poorer quality of life. Patients also experienced greater restriction of physical activity and required more help at school.

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The study also found that those children who were older when they were diagnosed had a better quality of life and less behavioural difficulties.

The research provides important information for clinicians treating medulloblastoma. Not only was the use of chemotherapy not superior in achieving a cure from the tumour but it also had a significant cost to quality of life.

The study has provided evidence to support the growing consensus that collecting information relating to the child's quality of life needs to be an integral part of research to find better treatments for medulloblastoma.

Chairman of the Trust, Neil Dickson says "Professor Kennedy was unable to find funding for this work from the Department of Health and other funding bodies in the United Kingdom. We were pleased to be able to support this vital work which will be of interest to paediatric neuro-oncologists throughout the world.

The quality of the research was recognised by the publication of the findings in the Journal of Clinical Oncology in late 2007. Brain cancer kills more children each year than any other cancer and we must do more to support this type of research".

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