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4

4

My First-Hand Experience with Melanoma

By Dr. Berggren



Everyday life can seem like a balancing act. The demands that come from our family and work often make putting our own health last on our priority list.

As a practicing, board-certified dermatologist for over a decade, my job is to educate my patients on skin cancer prevention, as well as diagnose and treat skin conditions. So imagine my surprise, when in April of this year, my husband spotted an unfamiliar mole on the crease behind my knee. I would have never noticed it myself. I relied on my own eyes and what I could see of my moles rather than having routine skin checks by one of my physician colleagues or physician assistants who are trained to look most everywhere on the body.

At first, I thought I had possibly irritated the mole while shaving that morning, but based off of its appearance, in my heart, I knew it was likely a Melanoma.

My suspicions were confirmed after what felt like a long wait for my biopsy results; I was diagnosed with Stage 1

Melanoma. While not good news, I was thankful it was Stage 1 and not something more aggressive. I immediately called my DuPage Medical Group colleagues who offered encouragement and advice. That same afternoon, my former colleague, Dr. Ashish Bhatia, conducted excision of the mole, which ended up being larger than a half-dollar in size. He and his staff were caring and supportive. Due to the location of my wound, I was unable to have stitches, but through appropriate care and assistance from my husband, I experienced a relatively quick and manageable recovery.

Following labs and X-rays, I visited oncologist [Dr. Daniel Frank](/our-physicians/daniel-jacob-frank/). When he asked about my mental state during the consult, I broke down into tears, now fully understanding the mental exhaustion of being a patient with a potentially life-threatening disease. While I've treated hundreds of Melanoma cases, experiencing this diagnosis and treatment as a patient brought a whole new perspective and made me more empathetic to my patients.

Melanoma is quite common; one in 50 people will get diagnosed with it. In fact, the American Cancer Society's statistics show there are more Melanomas from tanning beds than lung cancer incidents from smoking. I believe strongly that people must get yearly full-skin exams – dermatologists included! Some say to start at 40, but I recommend sooner, because the most common cancer in 26 to 40-year-olds is Melanoma.

I'm so thankful that my husband spotted that mole, and I was able to receive the help I needed. Going forward, I'm going to ensure that I take the time necessary as a busy, working mom to get a full, skin check. Based on my experience, Melanoma can happen to anyone. Remember, take the time and get appropriate care. Lean on your spouse, family, friends and colleagues for support in health and in the other demands of life. And, stay well.

In good health,

Kelle Berggren, MD
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Topics and Subtopics: [Cancer](/health-topics/cancer/) & [Skin Health](/health-topics/skin-beauty/)

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