

# 'Invisible tattoos' could improve body confidence after breast cancer radiotherapy

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Invisible tattoos could replace the permanent dark ink tattoos used to ensure that breast cancer patients having radiotherapy are treated in exactly the same spot during each session, according to results from a pilot study to be presented at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference today (Sunday)\*.

Research suggests that the permanent pin prick marks made on the skin of women having radiotherapy reminds them of their diagnosis for years to come, reducing body confidence and self-esteem.

It's also more difficult to spot these [tattoos](#) in dark-skinned women, potentially leading to inconsistencies in the area being treated.

The NIHR-funded researchers, based at The Royal Marsden hospital in London, asked 42 [breast cancer patients](#) undergoing radiotherapy to rate how they felt about their body, before the [treatment](#) and one month later.

Half the women were offered fluorescent tattoos, only visible under UV light, while the other half had conventional dark ink tattoos.

The researchers found that 56 per cent of the women who had fluorescent tattoos felt better about their bodies one month after treatment, compared to only 14 per cent among those who received black ink tattoos.

Using fluorescent tattoos also made no difference to the accuracy of

treatment and took only slightly longer to carry out, compared to conventional dark ink tattoos.

Steven Landeg, a senior radiographer from the Royal Marsden, who is presenting the data, said: "These findings suggest that offering fluorescent radiotherapy tattoos as an alternative to dark ink ones could help ameliorate the negative feelings some women feel towards their bodies after treatment. It's important to remember that body image is subjective and dark ink radiotherapy tattoos will affect patients differently, but we hope that these results will go some way towards making this a viable option for radiotherapy patients in the future."

Evelyn Weatherall, 62, Surrey, had six cycles of chemotherapy, followed by radiotherapy, after being diagnosed with [breast cancer](#) following routine mammography through the UK's breast screening programme.

She said: "I'd asked if I could be part of any kind of clinical trial during my treatment because I'd read about how successful they were proving to be. My doctors told me about the invisible tattoos they were pioneering at The Royal Marsden hospital and I was more than happy to take part. I had lost my hair during chemotherapy and felt that I didn't want another visible reminder of my cancer.

"I think I was one of the first to undergo this procedure and it really worked. There wasn't a mark on my skin after the [radiotherapy](#) planning. I was going to a wedding soon afterwards and knew I'd be able to wear an outfit that didn't make me feel self-conscious.

"It's wonderful to think that I may have been a part of something that could become standard in the future."

Professor Matt Seymour, NCRI's clinical research director said: "With more than half of all [cancer patients](#) now surviving 10 years and beyond,

it's imperative that we do everything we can to reduce the long term impact of treatment on patients, including cosmetic changes."

**More information:** Landeg S. et al, Breast Radiotherapy: Invisible Tattoos for External References. Conference abstract:  
[conference.ncri.org.uk/abstract ... /abstracts/B291.html](https://conference.ncri.org.uk/abstracts/B291.html)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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