



SIXTEEN STITCHES ARE A REMINDER OF SHELLY'S BATTLE WITH MELANOMA.

MELANOMA

By Shelly Foy

Thank you to everyone who continues to work on environmental programs and projects on your golf courses. While I normally use this space to tout all the wonderful things you are doing, this time I want to talk about something else you should be doing, and I will tell it with a personal story.

A few weeks ago I went to my dermatologist for my check up. He said, "Shelly, everything looks fine. I will see you in six months." But for over a year and a half I have had my eye on a spot on my arm. It started out looking like a freckle (better word than age spot). This spot was getting larger and I brought it up to the doctor at every check up. His response was that it was nothing to worry about. This time I brought it up again, got the same response, but I pushed the point and finally got him to agree to biopsy it. His office called a week later, said it was an atypical mole and that I should come in and they would scrape it off. We did this and I thought everything was fine.

A few nights later the phone rang and it was my doctor. He told me that, first of all, we did not get it all, and secondly, the lab reported it was a melanoma. He said he could not remove it (due to the depth) and sent me to a plastic surgeon.

Sixteen stitches later, again I think all is well, and again my phone rings a few days later.

The surgeon told me it was the "bad kind" of melanoma (is there a good kind?) and that once again, we did not get it all. He told me that, because I was diligent and caught this early, they feel confident that it has not spread and that they will be able to remove it. He also told me that had we been having this conversation a year from now it would be a totally different story. I will be back in his office at the end of June for another procedure, hopefully to remove all of the melanoma.

The take-away message here is that this spot on my arm was not anything that dermatologists tell us to look for. It was not raised, did not have irregular edges, and honestly looked like a couple of age spots that had simply melded together. This was a spot that my doctor had routinely told me not to worry about for almost two years.

What you need to be on the lookout for is ANY spot on your body that changes in ANY way.

Ten years ago a friend had a spot on her arm, and by the time she got it checked out, it was an advanced melanoma and she died within six weeks. My mother told me that it was my diligence that saved my life by insisting the spot be checked. In reality, it was the memory of my friend who died too young and left two teenage boys behind.

I hope that everyone who takes the time to read this will immediately do three things. First, look at every spot on your body and ask yourself, has this spot changed at all? Second, pick up the phone and make an appointment with a dermatologist, and always make sure you wear sunscreen, a hat, and even a long sheet shirt while you are out on the golf course. Third, take a long look at your family and friends and not only encourage them to be diligent out in the sun and to have regular checkups, but also think about how tough it would be for them to get along without you.

For information on skin cancer and what you can do to protect yourself, please visit: www.cancer.org, www.melanoma.com, www.skincancer.org

EDITOR'S NOTE: Shelly, thanks for sharing your experience and reminding us to be good stewards of our own health.

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