



Beauty boost for women fighting cancer

Wellbeing Everyone knows that women feel better when they look good, which is why make-up workshops for women undergoing cancer treatment are so important

It's ironic, and a bit unfair somehow, that chemotherapy has such rotten side-effects. While it's undeniably a life-saver for cancer patients, it can cause fatigue, sickness, skin irritation and hair loss.

The latter can be particularly hard for women, for whom hair, lashes and eyebrows are so much part of their personal style and character – and contribute hugely to femininity.

Recognising the connection between appearance and confidence is the charity Look Good Feel Better, which runs make-up workshops for women undergoing chemotherapy, including at the Bristol Haematology and Oncology Centre.

Run by volunteers – all from the beauty industry – the hour-long workshops take place every two or three weeks in one of the hospital's conference rooms. When I visit there are a dozen ladies all sitting around a huge oval table, each with a magnifying mirror and a bag of make-up in front of them. Some are chatting, others are applying lipstick or discussing the merits of a certain colour, and there's a genial, relaxed atmosphere.

Moving quietly around, advising, encouraging and demonstrating, are two volunteers and workshop leader Carol Davies, who is now retired but enjoyed a career with No 7, Lancome, Estée Lauder and Clinique, among other brands. She has been involved in these workshops for 15 years and is in no doubt as to their benefit, not least because her daughter attended a session after a breast cancer diagnosis.

"The workshops are not medical, they can be a bit frivolous, we have a laugh, and I think people feel comfortable here," she says.

"They sense that they're not alone. It's the camaraderie they get with other people, the feeling that someone else is going through the same thing and what they're feeling is not unusual. And they get to feel, as it says on the

tin, a bit better about themselves. It's about boosting confidence and making them feel better, particularly for women losing their hair – that's awful. I remember when my daughter was losing her eyebrows and eye lashes, that was worse than some of the treatment. They don't feel feminine and these workshops remind women that they are feminine and how they can be feminine.

"We go through how to look after skin, to cleanse it morning and night and, if they wear make-up, the importance of taking it off. Women will notice that, when they're having chemo, their skin gets a lot drier and it can sometimes get redder and more sensitive, so they have to be careful what they use on their skin. The products in the box we give them at the end are chosen with that in mind.

"It's an amazing goodie bag, probably worth about £300. They get a cleanser, toner and moisturiser, eye make-up remover, a green concealer that tones down redness, foundation, powder, blusher, eyebrow pencil, eye shadow, mascara, lip pencil and lipstick.

"We also do teenage workshops, in the teenagers' cancer care centre. They get a fantastic goodie bag, too, with brighter colours and nail varnish – it's a bit 'cooler'!"

M&S has just joined the charity and, as part of Look Good Feel Better week, June 1-7, Carol will be talking to its beauty department staff to spread the word, and hopefully recruit volunteers. "We are always on the lookout for volunteers," she says, "but we do like them to have a beauty background, in hairdressing, skin care or make-up.

"I'm going to M&S in The Mall to talk to them about what we do here and I'm taking along my daughter, who's had breast cancer and has been to one of these sessions, so we're doing a mother and daughter thing.

"Most of the volunteers are in their 30s or 40s, but it would be nice to have a few younger ones who can help at the teenager workshops too."

