



Bizarre

These girls say, 'I love having a tan. If I get skin cancer I'll just get it removed'. They're stupid and make me so angry



Making her mark ... the TV show uses computer-generated skin damage to show how Nicola Roberts could look if she had kept using sunbeds

BBC/RICOCHET/Ian Bartlett

By KATE WIGHTON

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GIRLS Aloud star Nicola Roberts used to be a self-confessed "tanorexic".

In her bid to be brown, she would fanatically smear on layers of fake tan every day.

Now proud to flaunt her pale, flawless skin, she has just finished filming a documentary about the UK's

deadly tanning obsession.



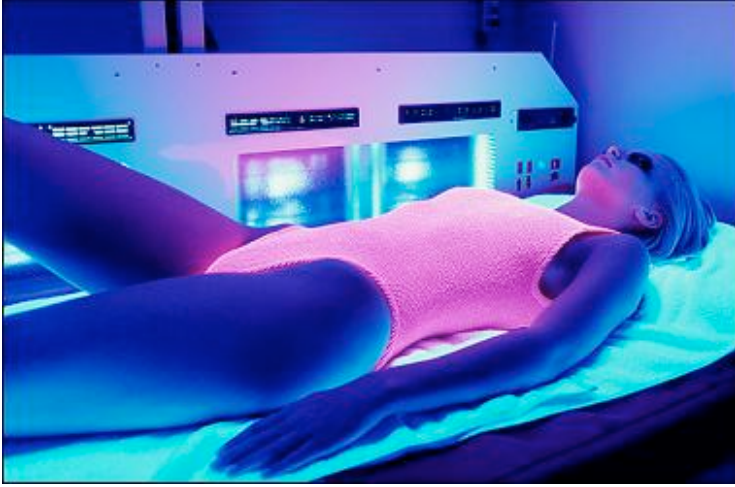
Sobs ... Nicola Roberts

The experience shocked the 24-year-old. She openly sobbed on camera, lashed out at sunbed users and travelled to Westminster to challenge MPs to ban sunbeds for under-18s.

The Sun has also campaigned for a sunbed age limit and for dangerous unmanned coin-operated booths to be outlawed.

Legislation is now going through Parliament. Nicola says: "After seeing people who are dying from skin cancer I realised it's not just a tan, it's about life and death.

"It's truly as serious as that."



Tanning addiction ... Britons love sunbeds

Nicola, from Cheshire, but who is now living in London, believes her obsession with tanning started when she joined the girl band aged just 17.

She admits: "I was obsessed. If I didn't have fake tan on I felt like death warmed up.

"The rest of the girls were lovely and bronzed.

"I knew people thought I was ugly compared to them.

"I thought maybe if I applied tan I'd have a little bit of what they'd got."

Nicola also used sunbeds.

She says: "I used them a couple of times but it would just burn me and give me freckles.

"Thank God it didn't make me go golden brown. I dread to think of the position I'd be in now."

After three years of fake tan Nicola decided to bin the lotion for good.

She says: "I started picking up fashion magazines and seeing models who weren't conventionally beautiful.

"Some had boggle eyes, pale skin and cropped hair, but they were so cool.

"I thought I looked more like them than the average pretty girl, so maybe I should go for that kind of look."



Shocking result of tanning ... Nicola visits cancer victims in hospital

While filming the show, Nicola met two tanorexics who gave her a stark reminder of her younger self.

But most gut-wrenching was meeting those stricken with skin cancer as a result of their sunbed habit.

The singer, who admits to being squeamish, even sat in on an operation one girl had to remove potential cancer cells.

She says: "I was shocked - I was under the illusion that if you have a cancerous mole you can have it scraped off.

"I wasn't prepared for what the patient had to go through - she had chunks of her body removed. This is the reality of cancer.

"I asked one patient what her message would be to people.

"She started crying and said, 'Please, just don't go on a sunbed'.

"Later, I was talking to some of the girls who were into tanning. They were saying to me, 'I love having a tan - if I get skin cancer I'll just have it removed. And I'll then probably end up going on the sunbeds again'.

"They were so ignorant towards it. I found myself getting really angry. I told them they sounded so, so stupid and that I felt like I was talking to absolute idiots. I felt bad afterwards, but I'd just been meeting people who were dying."

The Sunbed Association says most users don't have more than 20 sessions a year, which they say is a safe limit, and outdoor sun exposure, rather than sunbed use, is more to blame for the rising skin cancer rates.

But Nicola was so stunned by her findings she headed to Westminster to back a Private Member's Bill to outlaw unmanned sunbeds and ban under-18s from tanning salons.

She reveals: "As it's a BBC documentary they asked me to not have an opinion as it had to be neutral but I couldn't. I wasn't willing to not speak out."

- **Nicola Roberts: The Truth About Tanning, BBC Three, tonight at 9pm.**

Megan Carey

Sunbed addict

DANCE student Megan, 21, met Nicola two months ago.



Recovering sunbed addict ... Megan Carey

The star noticed their similarity in skin and hair tones. But while Nicola was her natural colour, Megan was much darker - the result of an eight-year sunbed addiction.

She says: "I started using sunbeds at 13.

"I used them twice a day. If one salon didn't let me use the beds a second time I'd just go somewhere else."

Her habit got so bad the skin on her back went numb. Her eyelids were also permanently red and burnt as she refused to wear the protective goggles for fear of getting white marks.

Megan, from Liverpool, says: "I once got so burnt on my back that I could hardly walk and was shaking. But I still went back the following day."

As a wake-up call to Megan, Nicola took her to a skin specialist, who revealed 97 per cent of her face was damaged.

Megan says: "I knew sunbeds could give you skin cancer but I didn't realise the real danger. I don't think anyone really does.

"I use fake tan now but one day I'm going to go to my natural skin colour - as long as I don't look too ill!"

Tom Crooks

Hooked on tan jabs

NICOLA knew 26-year-old Tom had a problem as soon as she stepped into his home.



Used tan injections ... Tom Crooks

She says: "I could smell the fake tan the minute I walked in. It was really overpowering" Tom, from Llanharry, Wales, at first didn't think he had a problem but now admits he was a tanning addict.

He had used sunbeds three times a week for the past nine years.

He also had spray tans, took tanning pills "like smarties" and used dangerous tanning injections.

Tom, a receptionist, says: "The injections gave me terrible side effects, including blinding headaches, stomach cramps and erections that lasted for two hours. But I couldn't stop - I needed my tanning fix."

Tom started regular Botox injections to fight wrinkles caused by sunbeds.

To help him kick his habit Nicola took away all his products and left him to go cold turkey for four weeks.

Tom managed the four weeks and has not used a tanning product since.

He says: "Everyone says I look much better.

"I feel much healthier and have more money too."

Ryan Harrison

Killed by tan

DAD-of-one Ryan liked nothing more than to be tanned.

His mum Nancy, 59, says: "He bought a sunbed for his house and would use it three times a week."



Tragic ... Ryan Harrison

A builder and fitness fan, he often showed off his bronzed physique.

But when he was just 30, Ryan's GP noticed a tiny dark mole on his neck. It was malignant melanoma - a form of skin cancer.

Ryan had some of the tissue removed. Six years later, in 2008, he noticed another lump.

In a cruel twist of fate, Ryan's dad John, 64, had also just had a potentially cancerous mole removed. Both he and Ryan had to collect their test results on the same day last March.

John got the all clear, but Ryan was told his disease had returned and spread around his body.

Despite vowing to fight it, Ryan's condition deteriorated and he died in June - six weeks after he married Avelynne, 32.

His family now plan to walk from his hometown of Holmfirth, West Yorks, to the Lake District, where he spent his last week, to raise money for skin cancer research.

To sponsor them, go to justgiving.com/Ryan-Harrison.

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Skin cancer: The facts

2,600

The number of people who die from skin cancer each year in the UK. Symptoms include a mole that changes shape or becomes itchy or a spot or sore that does not heal within four weeks.

2

There are two main types of skin cancer - non-melanoma which is very common and malignant melanoma which is less common but more serious.

10,400

The number of malignant melanoma cases each year. It is now the most common cancer in young adults (aged 15-34) in the UK and is more than twice as common in young women.

Over the last 25 years, rates of malignant melanoma in Britain have risen faster than any other common cancer.

The latest malignant melanoma survival rates show that more than 80 per cent of men and around 90 per cent of women survive the disease for at least five years after diagnosis.

2,000

The number of deaths each year from malignant melanoma.

100,000

The number of cases of non-melanoma every year in the UK.

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