

BOOBS

DO YOU KNOW

YOUR

COPIES?



'Breasts, boobs, melons, jugs - what do you call yours?' asks Kris Hallenga, founder of CoppaFeel!



'If we can give every young person the power to know their own body, we've done our best'

Cop a feel- it could save your life

Breast cancer doesn't just affect the over 50s – everyone should be checking their boobs

Interview by LUCY COLLINS Photography PETE SCHIAZZA

Breasts, boobs, tits, jugs, even melons: what do you call yours? It's a question CoppaFeel! founder Kris Hallenga poses to get women talking – and help them to avoid a late diagnosis of cancer.

Kris was 23 when she discovered a lump but her GP sent her away – her youth meant she didn't fit the profile for a breast cancer diagnosis because 81 per cent of those affected are women over 50, according to Breast Cancer Care.

Six months later the lump was the size of an avocado and the GP finally took it seriously. The cancer had spread to Kris's bones. She had a mastectomy, but the disease had become incurable.

Kris poured her shock and frustration at the diagnosis into setting up CoppaFeel!, a charity that encourages 18 to 30 year olds to check their breasts frequently and avoid a late, potentially fatal diagnosis. Two thousand cases of breast cancer are diagnosed at stage four each year. There is no stage five.

Kris believes late diagnosis could be reduced by compulsory cancer awareness on the school curriculum. In a BBC3 documentary, *Kris: Dying to Live*, she argued that 'one in three of us get cancer during our lives, surely that's a good enough reason to get it on the syllabus?'

'Young women should be checking themselves,' she says. 'There were many

points in my life, at school, sixth form, university, where I could have been told this message and it would have changed my outcome. We're letting young people down because cancer shouldn't be diagnosed late. If we can give everyone the power to know their own body, we've done our best.'

Her charity targets younger women in their natural habitats, at music festivals and universities where Boob Teams, student volunteers, remind women to check themselves. Boobettes – breast

cancer survivors under 35 - visit schools, work places and WIs to educate women. The charity sends witty 'check your boobs' texts to 15,000 women a month and, controversially, worked with *The Sun's* Page 3 to launch the Check 'Em Tuesday campaign.

Twitter campaigns #rethinkcancer and #whatnormalfeelslike are supported by celebrities including Lorraine Kelly, Nicole Scherzinger and Fearne Cotton.

The hashtags challenge women to come up with a word to describe their breasts. 'Not enough women can answer this, as they're not checking regularly. Those who do struggle to find the word to describe what's normal for them,' says Kris.

'Peachy' is the word she uses. 'Peachy is normal for me. I've only got one. I check it regularly because I'd be stupid not to.'

Cancer has given Kris a purpose in life. A 'flighty teenager' who tried lots of different things, she had a passion for

travel but her treatment put paid to this. She has no regrets, though. 'If the day I was diagnosed could be taken away, I'd say no. I didn't know what I wanted; now I've got a job and a life I like. I wouldn't have it any other way because then all the impact we've had would be taken away.'

The CoppaFeel! message is working, says Kris. 'The golden moments are when people say "because of you I checked my boobs and was diagnosed early". We do research every year so we know the levels of behaviour change and we know we're having a good impact.'

Kris, now 29, is kept alive by bone infusion and hormone treatments to keep the cancer at bay but is in constant pain, which she says is 'do-able' with the aid of painkillers. 'When things are good, things are good.'

Despite making the most of her limited lifespan, questions remain. 'My friends are getting married and having babies. I've never wanted that but what makes me angry is that the choice has been taken away from me. You get to a point in your life when other people are moving on to the next step and that step is never reachable for me, so I've got to be in this zone where I say "okay, must stay happy with job then,"' she laughs.

Telling her twin Maren 'I've got cancer' was the worst moment of Kris's life. 'It's a mutual sadness. If something happens to the twin, it's happening to the other; there's no separation. In a way we both have cancer.'

'Check your boobs!' she says chirpily, sipping from her 'I ♥ boobs' mug when I ask for her message to WI members. 'Get to know your boobs, quit taking life for granted, bake more cakes - and send them to CoppaFeel!' **WI**

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