

SURVIVORS WANT surgery, 'normal' look

Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

An increasing number of breast cancer survivors — 70% cases detected early can be fully cured — are keen on aesthetic surgery once the tumour is removed.

The demand has forced many cancer surgeons to acquire skills to perform cosmetic surgeries in addition to removing cancerous tumours. The union of cancer surgery with plastic surgery techniques, termed as oncoplastic breast conservation, is a field fast gaining acceptance in urban cancer centres. Oncoplastic procedures were popular in the West for five to seven years, now Indian patients and doctors are warming up to the idea.

Technically, oncoplastic procedures entail removal of the cancerous tumour, repairing the breast to correct small or larger defects to give it a near normal appearance and creation of evenness with the normal breast. Surgical oncologist of Kokilaben Hospital Dr Mandar Nadkarni said, "Now, most women opting for breast conservation are more than happy to undergo oncoplastic surgery for excellent cosmetic outcomes with absolute safety." In Parel's Tata Memorial Hospital (TMH), of the 70% women whose cancer is detected early and undergo a breast conservation surgery, about 25% insist on oncoplastic surgery. Director of TMH Dr Rajendra Barwe said, "It's about having a nice body." Echoing the view, Dr P Raghunath Ram, director of KIMS Ushalaxmi Centre for Breast Diseases in Hyderabad said, "Leaving a woman with deformed breasts is worse than mastectomy (complete removal)".

"It helps women get on with their lives," feels oncosurgeon Dr Anil Haroor of Fortis Hospital. He says patients of lumpectomy (only the tumour is removed), suffer to see the dented breast daily. "Oncoplastic surgeons mobilize portions of breast tissues to fill the cavity of the surgery, or align it with the other breast to give an even look. It works wonders," he adds.

Padmashri awardee and dancer Ananda Shankar Jayant, who had a 2 cm malignant tumour, will vouch for it. The Hyderabad-based dancer said, "I chose oncoplastic surgery as it helped me get on with my life almost immediately," she said. Her oncoplastic procedure was done on the same operation table as the cancer surgery. "It makes more sense to do it together as the patient doesn't have to go under the knife repeatedly," said surgical oncologist Dr Sanjay Sharma, who consults in SL Raheja and Lilavati Hospitals. "A patient is relieved to see near-normal breasts immediately after surgery," he added.

But Kolkata-based oncologist and member of Indian Co-operative Oncology Network Dr Gouri Bhattacharyya, said the technique is in very nascent stages. "In cities like Kolkata, breast conservation is up to 8-10%, from 2%. We need more dedicated units," he added.

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Oncoplastic Procedure

A reconstructive procedure done to restore the operated breast to its near-normal appearance. Main idea is to help reduce psychological morbidity. It combines principles of cancer surgery with techniques of plastic surgery. It should not be confused with breast reconstructive surgery after mastectomy. Tissues used to fill the breast cavities belong to one's own body. Radiation is mandatory for patients of breast conservation going for oncoplastic procedures. Patient developing a recurrence may require complete mastectomy. Cost of cancer treatment could go up by 2.5-3 times in a private set-up.

Commonly used oncoplastic procedures **Mastopexy** | A procedure that lifts the breast and increases projection. Helps in creating symmetry in the nipple position as well as breasts. **Reduction mammoplasty or breast reduction** | It is performed in cases where the tumour is large in a relatively large breast. Some patients choose to undergo the procedure even in the normal breast, for a symmetrical look. **Local skin flaps and lipofills** | Local procedures where fat is taken from other parts of the body like the abdomen, and is instilled in the cavity of the surgery. **External implants** | Implants in the form of silicone implants or expanders are also used in certain cases. Here, plastic surgeons are involved in the surgery.

Advantages of oncoplastic surgery

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